WHO FIGHTER

WITH HEART OF DARKNESS

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DARK HORSE MANGA™

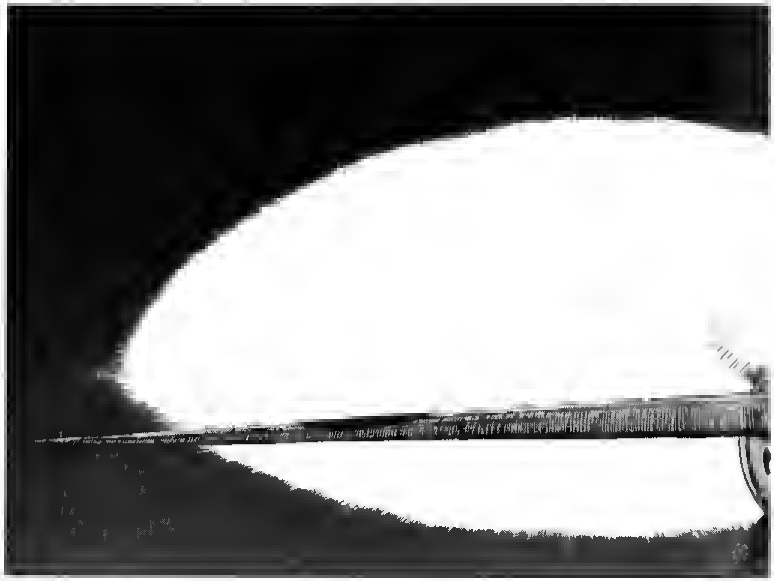
DURING THE PACIFIC WAR, THERE WAS A STRANGE REPORT BY THE CREW OF A STRATEGIC BOMBER THAT ATTACKED THE JAPANESE MAINLAND. THEY CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN AN UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT, REFERRED TO AS A "BALL OF FIRE."
THIS OBJECT, WHICH WAS ALSO CALLED "BAKA" AT ONE POINT, FOLLOWED THE B-29 AND WAS SEEN FLYING AROUND ERRATICALLY. THE OBJECT'S LENGTH SOMETIMES APPEARED TO BE ABOUT HALF THE SIZE OF THE BODY OF THE B-29, AND AT OTHER TIMES IT SEEMED SIX TO SEVEN TIMES LARGER THAN A TRACER ROUND.

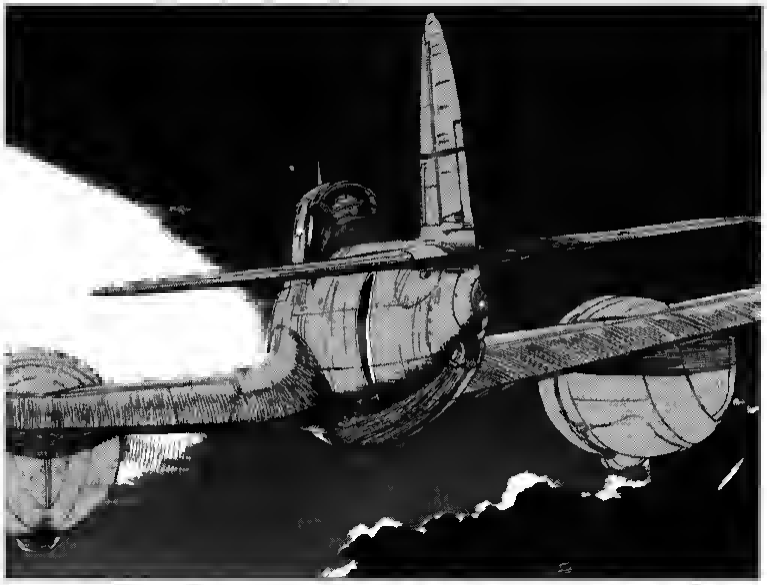
HOWEVER, THERE ARE NO RECORDS OF THE JAPANESE MILITARY USING SUCH ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS DURING THESE NIGHTTIME RAIDS.
IT WAS BELIEVED THAT THE OBJECT WAS A PHOSPHOROUS BOMB, CALLED TAOAN OR "SANGO BAKUDAN" BY THE JAPANESE FORCES.
HUH?
KLICK
ROGER.
CAPTAIN, WE'RE ALMOST OVER THE PENINSULA.
NOVEMBER 30, 1944, 0110 HOURS. 7,000 FEET OVER THE IZU PENINSULA.
WHAT THE--?
VRRR
VRRR
VRRR
?!
CAPTAIN! AT THREE O'CLOCK!
WHAT? BOGEYS?!

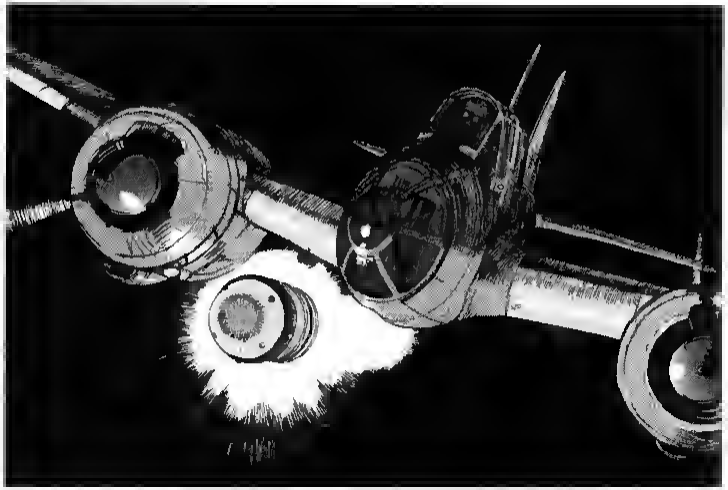
WHO FIGHTER

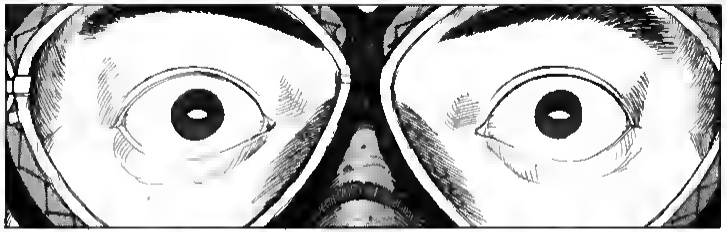
SAME DAY. 01:30 HOURS. 3,000 METERS OVER HACHIOJI, TOKYO.
VRRRR
VRRRR
VRRRR
VRRRR
DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING?
ACCORDING TO INTELLIGENCE, IT SHOULD BE HERE SOON...
NO, NOTHING.
TAKI 2. THE TAKI 2 ANTI-AIRCRAFT ELECTRONIC ORIENTATION PLANE WAS DEVELOPED BY THE ARMY AIRCRAFT FORCES AND EQUIPPED WITH AIRAOAR PROTOTYPE.
IF THIS TAKI 2 DOESN'T WORK FOR US, NIGHTTIME ATTACKS WILL BE HELL.
AT THIS RATE, I CAN'T TELL WHAT'S A GROUND-REFLECTED WAVE AND WHAT ISN'T.
WE'RE GETTING A READING NO MATTER WHERE WE FLY.

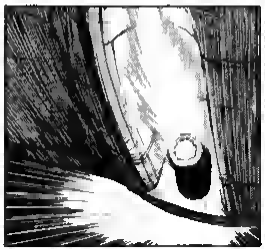
AHH!
KLUNK
PING
?!
KZZTT
KZZTT
KZZTT
WHAT IS THAT?!
!!
FSHH

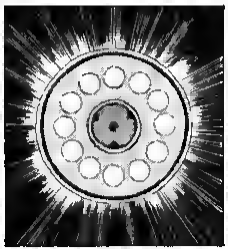


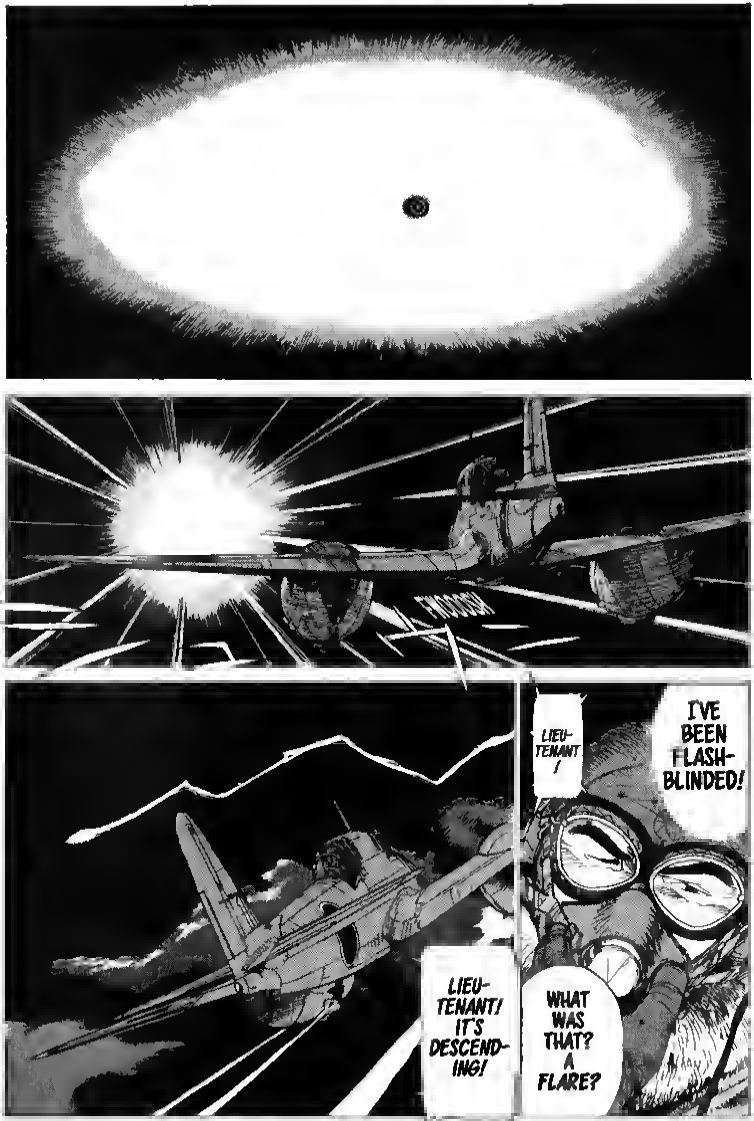


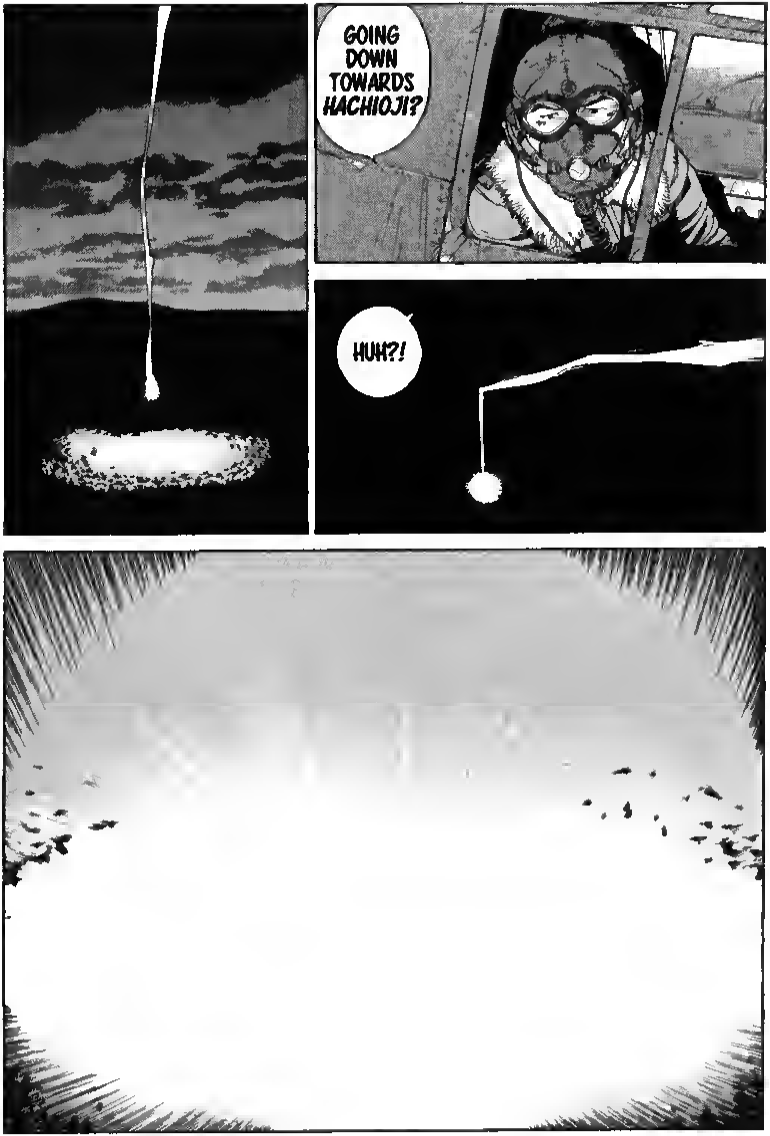









I'VE BEEN FLASH-BLINDED!
LIEU-TENANT!
WHAT WAS THAT? A FLARE?
LIEU-TENANT! IT'S DESCEND-ING!


GOING DOWN TOWARDS HACHIOJI?
HUH?!

CAN YOU SEE ANY FLAMING WRECKAGE BACK THERE?
NO SIR!
...?!
WHAT... WAS THAT?
???
WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE?

WAS IT A SHORT CIRCUIT ?
THE ELEC-TRONICS ARE COOKED.
NO. LIGHTNING DIDN'T DO IT...NOT THAT I KNOW WHAT ELSE IT COULD HAVE BEEN.
I SEE.
COULD IT HAVE BEEN LIGHT-NING?
ALL THE VACUUM TUBES ARE DESTROYED. IF WE HAD A BATTERY THAT COULD CAUSE SUCH A SHORT, OUR LIVES WOULD BE MUCH EASIER.
STEP AWAY FROM THAT PLANE!

MILITARY POLICE, HUH?
THIS PLANE IS TO BE PLACED UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE ARMY NOBORITO RESEARCH FACILITY!
I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE FROM MACHIDA OR NOBORITO...YOU CAN'T TELL US WHAT TO DO!
THIS PLACE IS HOME TO THE ARMY AIR SQUADRON. INVESTIGATION DIVISION.
CAP-TAIN...
COME WITH ME.
YOU DARE QUESTION THE MILITARY POLICE FORCE ...?
KITA-YAMA.

...BUT THIS ORDER HAS COME DOWN FROM COMMAND HEADQUARTERS. I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.
I KNOW...
COM-MAND HEAD-QUARTERS ?
THE TAKI IS AN IMPORTANT RESEARCH UNIT FOR ACCOMPLISHING NIGHTTIME ATTACKS. AND YOU WANT TO—
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WE HAVE TO HAND OVER THE PLANE WE'RE EXAMIN-ING?
"HE'S A CIVILIAN EMPLOY-EE..."
THE PLANE WILL BE DIS-MANTLED AND SHIPPED OUT IN A FEW DAYS.
EXCUSE ME.
FEH!
MY NAME IS OZAKI, FROM RESEARCH NINE. NICE TO MEET YOU.
BY THE WAY, ARE YOU LIEUTENANT KITAYAMA?
I'D LIKE TO SPEAK WITH YOU REGARDING THE "THING" YOU SAW LAST NIGHT. IS THAT ALL RIGHT?
I AM.

RESEARCH NINE' ARMY HOBORITO RESEARCH FACILITY.

I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND.
I'M AFRAID WE GOT OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT.
ISN'T IT UNFAIR FOR YOU TO ASK ALL OF THE QUESTIONS?
I SUPPOSE YOU HAVE A POINT.
DID YOU PURSUE IT?
...
IN ANY EVENT, WE STILL NEED TO GO INVESTIGATE THE CRASH SITE. EXCUSE ME.
!
YOU KNOW THE LOCATION OF THE CRASH SITE?
YES.
...
I SEE. THE TRUTH IS, WE'VE ALREADY BEGUN *OUR* INVESTIGATION.
HOW ABOUT A FAIR EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION?
...
JUST WHAT I THOUGHT!

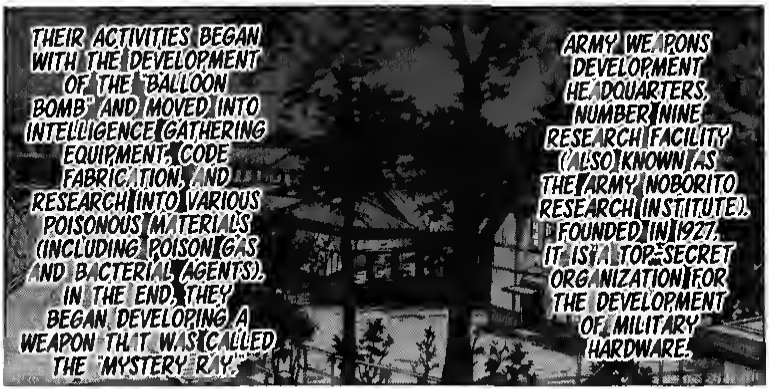
SO THERE ARE OTHERS?
...BUT YOU ARE THE ONLY COMMISSIONED FLIGHT OFFICER WHO'S WITNESSED IT. SO--
VRRMM
NORMALLY, WE WOULDN'T SHOW AN OUTSIDER...
WE WOULD ASK YOU TO KEEP ANYTHING YOU SEE HERE FROM ANYONE, INCLUDING YOUR SUPERIORS.
HERE WE ARE!
FWPP
KCHAK
TMP

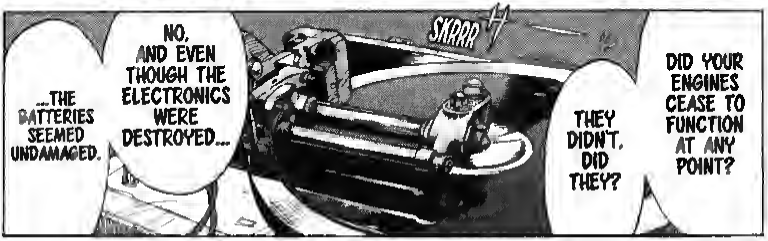
WHAT IS THIS?!
EVERY TREE WITHIN A FOUR HUNDRED METER RADIUS HAS BEEN OBLITERATED.
THE ONLY THINGS WE FOUND WERE SMALL METALLIC FRAGMENTS. NONE OF THOSE WERE LARGER THAN FIFTY CENTIMETERS.
DID YOU FIND A WING... OR ANYTHING FROM THE ENGINES?
NOTHING.
WE HAVE NO WAY OF TELLING ITS SIZE, POWER SOURCE, OR PURPOSE.

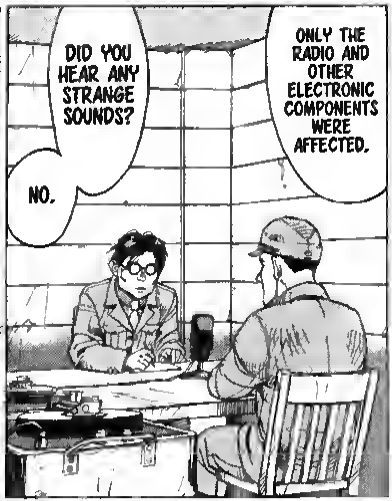
I THINK YOU KNOW ALREADY, DON'T YOU?
WHAT WAS THAT THING?
WE BELIEVE "IT" TO BE A NEW AMERICAN WEAPON.
...AND THE NAVY CALLS IT A "LUMINESCENT OBJECT."
AT RESEARCH NINE, WE CALL IT A "FIREBALL" ...
...LIEUTENANT KITAYAMA?
...
YOU *WILL* HELP US INVESTIGATE IT, WON'T YOU?
!!

THIS COULD BE THE RESULT OF A NEW TYPE OF AMERICAN BOMB.
THEY WANT TO TALK TO US ABOUT THE "FIREBALL" WE SAW LAST NIGHT.
GO TO *NOBORITO*? MYSELF INCLUDED?
IT'S ALREADY BEEN CLEARED WITH COMMAND.
BUT MY DUTIES--
THEY'LL BE HERE THIS EVENING TO PICK US UP.

LIEU-TENANT!
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
WELL, THERE IS A FOOD SHORTAGE, BUT...
MAN! THIS IS TERRIBLE ...
I'LL BE WITH YOU. SO DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
MAYBE SOMEONE ATE ITS LIVER?
IT'S OUR GUARD DOG.
SOMEONE KILLED IT AND TOOK OUT ITS ORGANS!


THEIR ACTIVITIES BEGAN WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "BALLOON BOMB" AND MOVED INTO INTELLIGENCE GATHERING EQUIPMENT, CODE FABRICATION, AND RESEARCH INTO VARIOUS POISONOUS MATERIALS (INCLUDING POISON GAS AND BACTERIAL AGENTS). IN THE END, THEY BEGAN DEVELOPING A WEAPON THAT WAS CALLED THE "MYSTERY RAY."
ARMY WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT HEADQUARTERS, NUMBER NINE RESEARCH FACILITY (ALSO KNOWN AS THE ARMY NOBORITO RESEARCH INSTITUTE). FOUNDED IN 1927. IT IS A TOP-SECRET ORGANIZATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY HARDWARE.

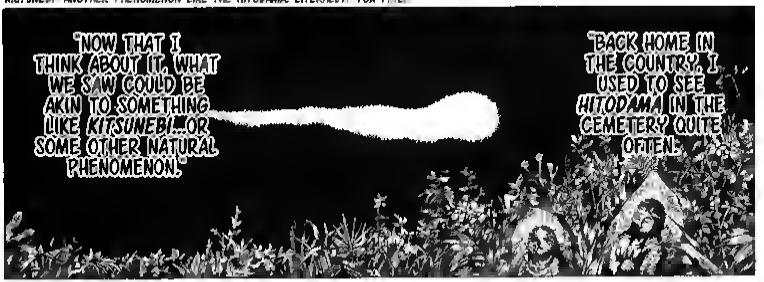

SKRRR
...THE BATTERIES SEEMED UNDAMAGED.
NO, AND EVEN THOUGH THE ELECTRONICS WERE DESTROYED...
THEY DIDN'T, DID THEY?
DID YOUR ENGINES CEASE TO FUNCTION AT ANY POINT?

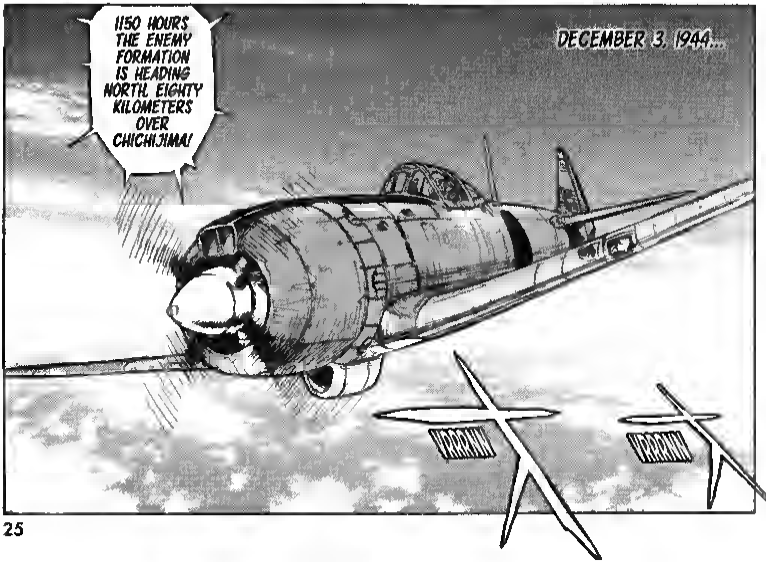


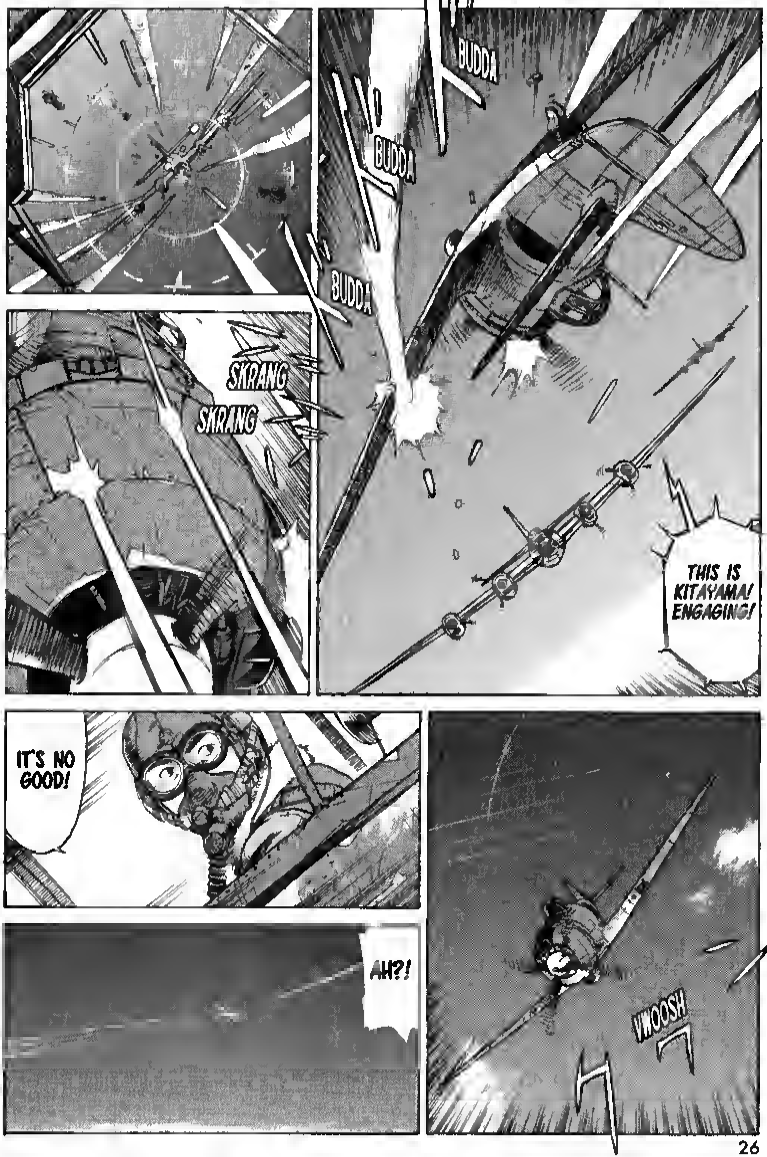
NOTE: THE PHONOGRAPH IN PANEL TWO IS RECORDING THEIR CONVERSATION.

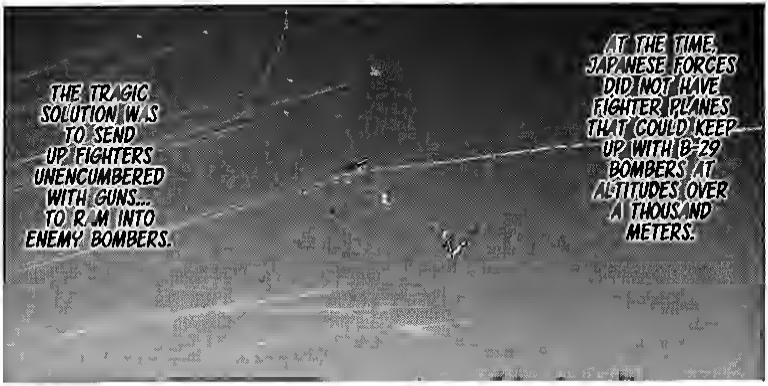
SHIFF
IT'S GETTING LATE. LET'S CONTINUE THIS AT ANOTHER TIME.
PLAYING DUMB. EH?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
A RADIO WAVE WEAPON, YOU SAY? I'VE ONLY HEARD RUMORS.
BUT TO BLOW OUT A VACUUM TUBE FROM HUNDREDS OF METERS AWAY WOULD REQUIRE A TREMENDOUS POWER SOURCE. I DON'T THINK THE AMERICANS COULD HAVE SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
THEN WHAT DO YOU THINK IT IS?
BESIDES, WE CAN BARELY KEEP UP WITH THEIR PLANES AS IT IS. THEY WOULDN'T NEED SUCH A THING.
VROOMM

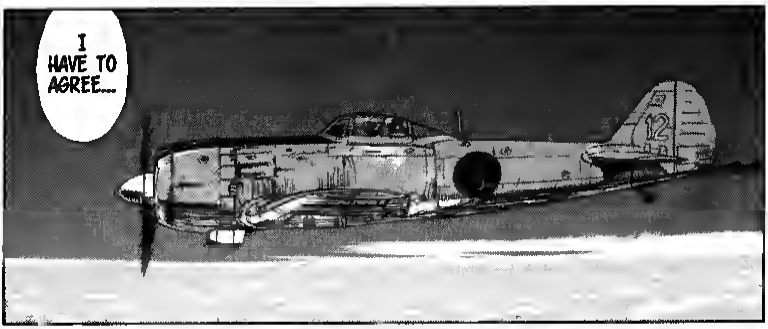
HITODAMA WISPY BALLS OF FLAME SAID TO BE THE SPIRITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED. LITERALLY, "SPIRIT BALL."
KISTUNEBI ANOTHER PHENOMENON LIKE THE HITODAMA. LITERALLY, "FOX FIRE."

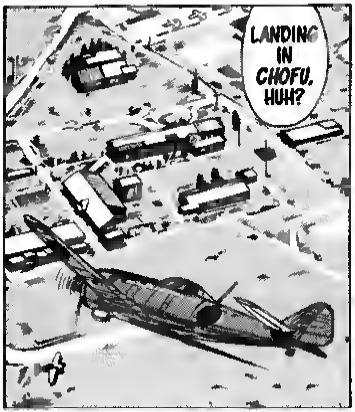

"NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, WHAT WE SAW COULD BE AKIN TO SOMETHING LIKE KITSUNEBI OR SOME OTHER NATURAL PHENOMENON."
"BACK HOME IN THE COUNTRY, I USED TO SEE HITODAMA IN THE CEMETERY QUITE OFTEN."



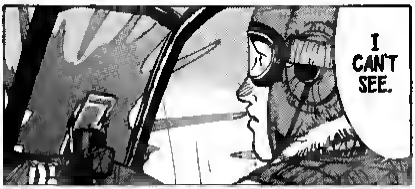

BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
SKRANG
SKRANG
THIS IS KITAYAMA! ENGAGING!
IT'S NO GOOD!
AH?!
WOOSH


THE TRAGIC SOLUTION W.S TO SEND UP FIGHTERS UNENCUMBERED WITH GUNS... TO R.M INTO ENEMY BOMBERS.
AT THE TIME, JAPANESE FORCES DID NOT HAVE FIGHTER PLANES THAT COULD KEEP UP WITH B-29 BOMBERS AT ALTITUDES OVER A THOUSAND METERS.


I HAVE TO AGREE....


LANDING IN CHOFU, HUH?

...SO THERE'S NO REASON FOR THE AMERICANS TO USE A NEW WEAPON.
...THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN MATCH THE B-29...


I CAN'T SEE.

...BECAUSE OF THE OIL LEAK, I WAS UNABLE TO SEE IN FRONT OF ME.
IT'S NOT AS IF I COULDN'T MAKE IT BACK TO TACHIKAWA, BUT...
I'M SURE THEY'LL COME GET ME IF I CALL.
BRINNG RINGG
I'LL ARRANGE A CAR FOR YOU.
OH, NO.
IT'S OKAY.
HELLO?
I DIDN'T GET A NAME...
FROM WHO?
LIEUTENANT KITAYAMA, THERE IS A CALL FOR YOU.
A CALL?

NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
NO TALK
WHAT ?!
?
IS SOME-THING WRONG?
WHO IS THIS?!
EXCUSE ME.
MUST'VE BEEN CROSSED WIRES. WE WERE DISCON-NECTED.
CHKK
OH... IT'S NOTHING.

WHAT'S THIS EERIE SENSATION THAT I HAVE...?
»HFF«
»HFF«
»HFF«
»HFF«
WAS IT MERE COINCIDENCE THAT I LANDED HERE...?
WHO WAS THAT PHONE CALL FROM...?!
WHO...

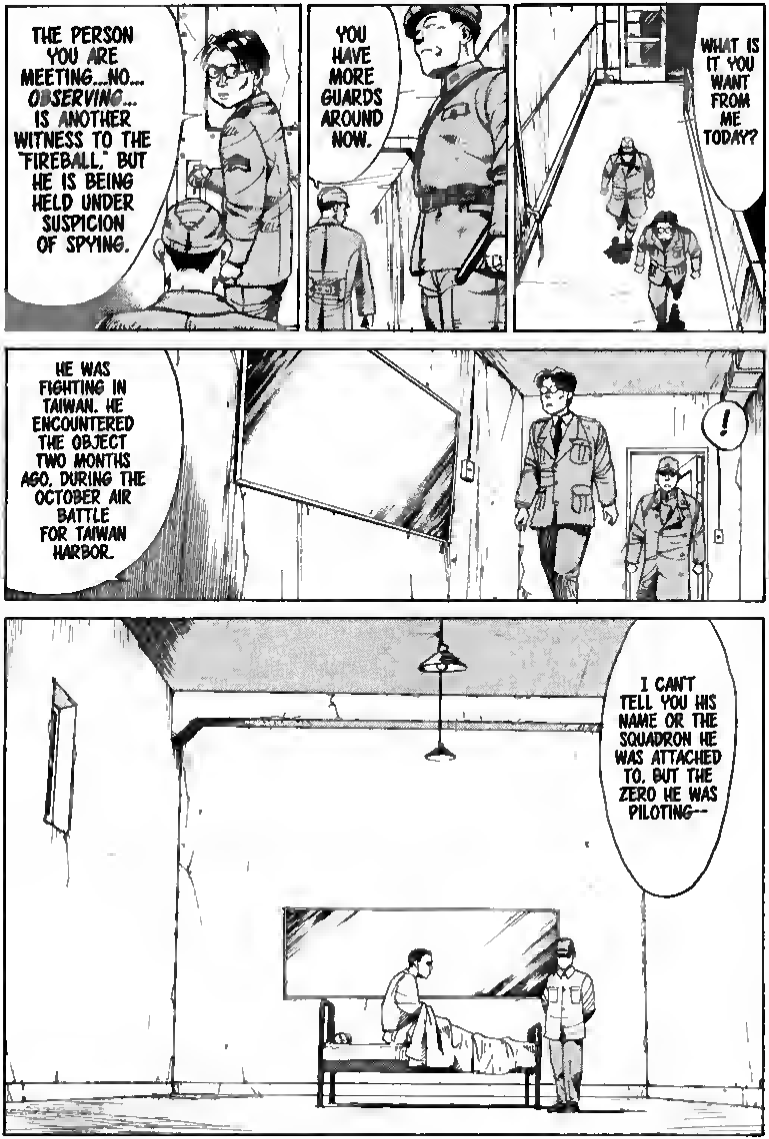
NO...IT'S PROBABLY BEST NOT TO DWELL ON IT.
IF SO, I COULD'VE JUST BEEN SUFFERING FROM A DELUSION... HEARING THINGS.
FFCH
COULD IT EVEN BE AIRCRAFT NEUROSIS? SHELL SHOCK?
IT WAS RIGHT AFTER A BATTLE. IT'S POSSIBLE I WAS SUFFERING FROM SOME HYPOXIA.
KNOCK
KNOCK
HUH ?
COME IN...
NO. WHY WOULD THEY HAVE NEEDED TO CONFISCATE THE TAK!?
SO, ARE THEY TRYING TO MAKE ME SOME KIND OF RESEARCH ANIMAL?

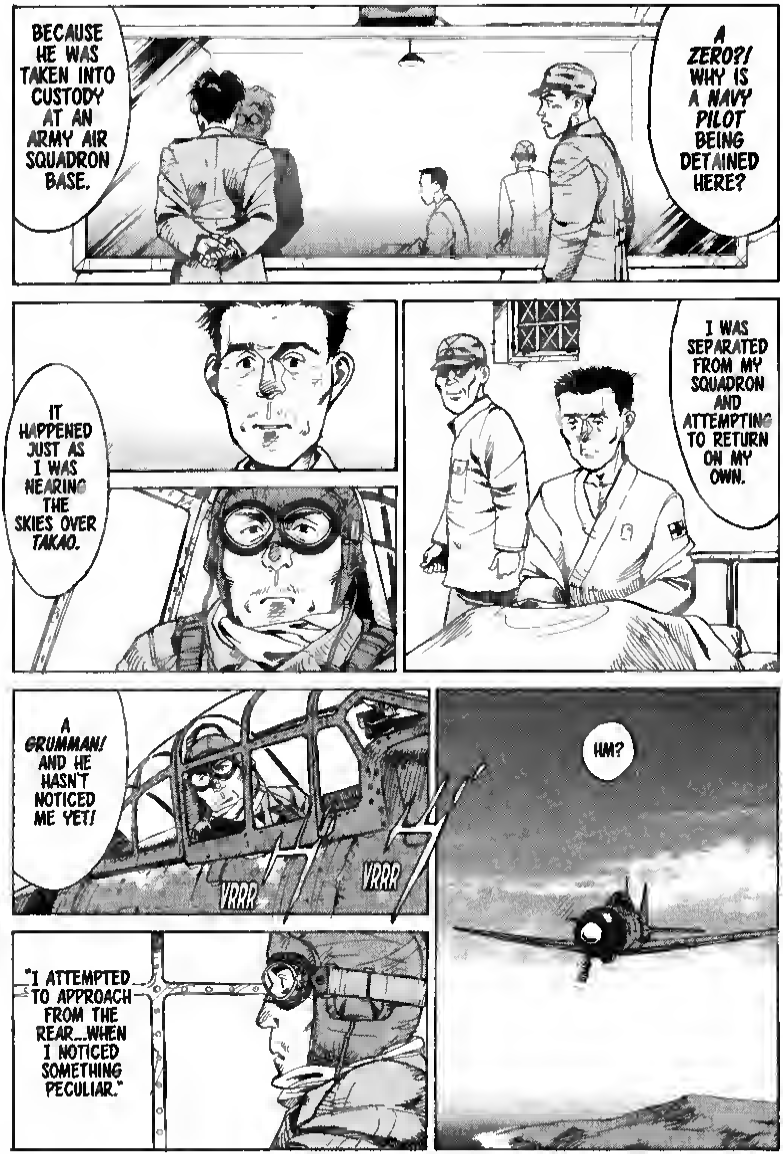
 HYPOXIA: OXYGEN DEFICIENCY COMMON IN HIGH ALTITUDE FLYING WHICH CAN CAUSE DISORIENTATION AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS.

EXCUSE PLEASE.
TMPP
KTCHAK
WHAT YOU SAW NOTHING BUT NATURAL PHENOMENON. NO NEED TO INVESTIGATE ANYMORE. NEED TO NO TALK TO ANYONE...
WHO'S THIS GUY? WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIS BREATHING ...?
PLEASE TELL WHAT LIEUTENANT SAW. STRANGE OBJECT?
HRRRF
HRRRF
WHAT?
SHUDDER

WAIT!
TMPP
TMPP
WHO ARE YOU? HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?
WSHH
FREEZE
KACHIKK
FWSHH

?!
RMM
VRMM
ANY INCIDENTS SINCE WE LAST MET?
NO. NOTHING.
BTAM
SORRY TO HAVE TO BRING YOU IN AGAIN.


THE PERSON YOU ARE MEETING...NO... OBSERVING... IS ANOTHER WITNESS TO THE "FIREBALL," BUT HE IS BEING HELD UNDER SUSPICION OF SPYING.
YOU HAVE MORE GUARDS AROUND NOW.
WHAT IS IT YOU WANT FROM ME TODAY?
HE WAS FIGHTING IN TAIWAN. HE ENCOUNTERED THE OBJECT TWO MONTHS AGO, DURING THE OCTOBER AIR BATTLE FOR TAIWAN HARBOR.
!
I CAN'T TELL YOU HIS NAME OR THE SQUADRON HE WAS ATTACHED TO, BUT THE ZERO HE WAS PILOTING---


BECAUSE HE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AT AN ARMY AIR SQUADRON BASE.
A ZERO?! WHY IS A NAVY PILOT BEING DETAINED HERE?
IT HAPPENED JUST AS I WAS NEARING THE SKIES OVER TAKAO.
I WAS SEPARATED FROM MY SQUADRON AND ATTEMPTING TO RETURN ON MY OWN.
A GRUMMAN! AND HE HASN'T NOTICED ME YET!
VRRR
VRRR
HM?
"I ATTEMPTED TO APPROACH FROM THE REAR...WHEN I NOTICED SOMETHING PECULIAR."

TAKAO, NORTHERN REGION OF TAIWAN.

IS SOME-THING WRONG?
?!
THE GRUMMAN...
GLPP
THAT GRUMMAN...
...WAS STOPPED IN MIDAIR."
12

"I COULD CLEARLY SEE ITS THREE PROPELLERS.
...
ARE YOU CERTAIN?
"...I CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE."
"AFTER THAT...
"...WAS FOUND A MONTH LATER, AT AN ARMY AIR SQUADRON BASE IN KASHIWA."
WHY IS HE SUSPECTED OF BEING A SPY?
THE ZERO HE WAS PILOTING ---

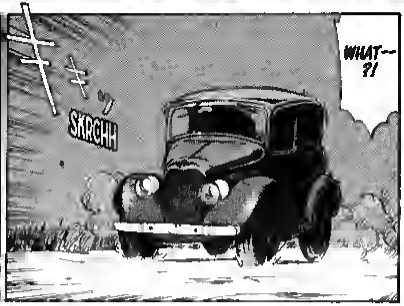
KASHIWA: CURRENTLY KNOWN AS KASHIWA CITY IN CHIBA PREFECTURE.

"...WE BELIEVE THAT HE WAS FORCED TO LAND ON THEIR CARRIER AND LEAKED INFORMATION REGARDING OUR AIR DEFENSES."
?!
TWO MONTHS AGO, BEFORE THE AMERICAN FORCES BEGAN THEIR FULL-SCALE BOMBARDMENT ON TOKYO...
BUT IT'S NOT BEYOND THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY.
THAT CAN'T BE TRUE...
"HE SAYS HE CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING THAT HAPPENED TO HIM DURING THE MONTH HE WAS MISSING.
"NOW ALL THIS ONE WANTS TO TALK ABOUT IS HIS ENCOUNTER WITH A BALL OF FIRE.
"IN 1922, DURING THE SIGNING OF THE WASHINGTON NAVAL TREATY, ALL COMMUNICATIONS FROM JAPAN WERE BEING INTERCEPTED BY THE U.S.
THE INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING ABILITY OF THE AMERICANS IS SOMETHING TO BE FEARED.

WASHINGTON NAVAL TREATY: A TREATY SIGNING CONFERENCE HELD IN WASHINGTON, D.C., LIMITING NAVAL ARMAMENTS. ALL CODED COMMUNICATIONS FROM JAPAN WERE BROKEN BY THE U.S. AND USED TO MOVE THE CONFERENCE TO THEIR ADVANTAGE.

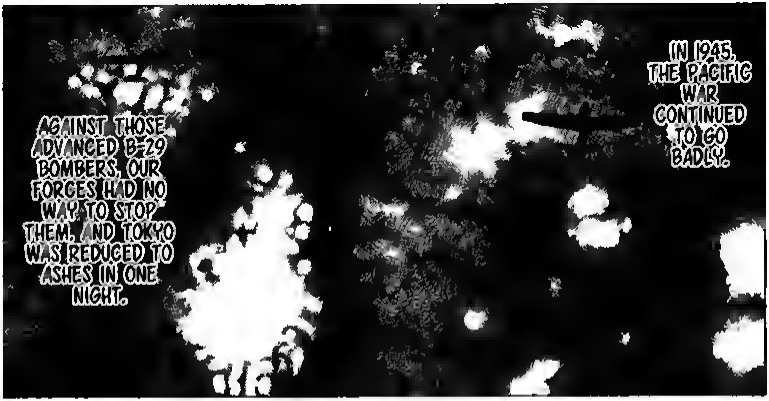
"THE AMERICANS WHO HELD HIM CAPTIVE MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING BEFORE RELEASING HIM.
"WHETHER IT WAS SOME KIND OF HYPNOTIC SUGGESTION OR A COMPLEX BRAINWASHING, I DON'T KNOW. EITHER WAY, IT'S FRIGHTENING TO THINK OF WHAT THEY'RE CAPABLE OF."
SO...AM I UNDER SUSPICION AS WELL?
WE REPORTED THIS TO THE NAVY, BUT THEY HAVEN'T RESPONDED TO US YET. MOST LIKELY, THEY FEAR A SCANDAL.
OF COURSE NOT! THERE WAS HARDLY ANY TIME BETWEEN YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH THE "FIREBALL" AND WHEN YOU LANDED BACK AT YOUR BASE.
BUT PLEASE BE ON YOUR GUARD...
IF WE SUSPECTED EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM, THERE WOULD BE NO END TO IT.
...
ALSO, THERE WERE MANY OTHER WITNESSES TO YOUR EVENT.

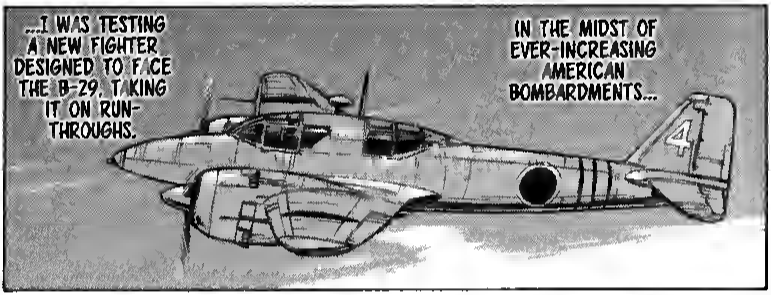
VRUMM
I'LL KEEP IT IN MIND ...
...IN ADDITION TO WHAT YOU WERE TOLD INSIDE, WE HAVE EVIDENCE THAT ENEMY SPIES HAVE INFILTRATED OUR MILITARY.
BRUMM
RMMM
I SEE...SO THEN, WAS THAT MAN IN BLACK FROM LAST NIGHT A SPY...?
IF HE WAS AN ASIAN-AMERICAN SPY, THEN THAT STRANGE SPEECH PATTERN WOULD MAKE SENSE.
SKREE
?
INFILTRATING A MILITARY FACILITY SO DEEP WITHIN OUR NATION...WHAT WAS HE AFTER?
!!
SKREE
SKREE


SKRCHH
WHAT--
?!

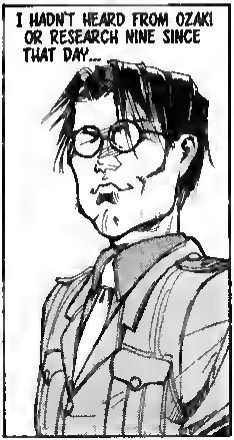
WHAT'S
THE
MATTER
?!

HUH? WE'RE THERE?
SKCHH
MUST'VE FALLEN ASLEEP.
CHOK
THANK YOU.
HUH ?!
...AND I NEVER GOT OUT OF THE CAR...
...BUT THEN I WAS SITTING IN FRONT!
I WAS SITTING BACK THERE...


IN 1945, THE PACIFIC WAR CONTINUED TO GO BADLY.
AGAINST THOSE ADVANCED B-29 BOMBERS, OUR FORCES HAD NO WAY TO STOP THEM, AND TOKYO WAS REDUCED TO ASHES IN ONE NIGHT.


IN THE MIDST OF EVER-INCREASING AMERICAN BOMBARDMENTS...
...I WAS TESTING A NEW FIGHTER DESIGNED TO FACE THE B-29, TAKING IT ON RUN-THROUGHS.

...AND IN MY RIGOROUS DUTIES, BEFORE I HAD REALIZED IT, THE EVENTS OF THAT NIGHT SLOWLY FADED OUT OF MY MEMORY.


I HADN'T HEARD FROM OZAKI OR RESEARCH NINE SINCE THAT DAY...

...AND THERE'S MORE THAT *MUST'VE* HAPPENED, BUT IT'S ALL SO CLOUDY...
THE TRUTH IS, THE MEMORIES OF THAT NIGHT HAVE STARTED TO BECOME CLEARER AND CLEARER...
...NO...I TRIED TO FORGET THEM.
HM ...?
LIEUTENANT, THERE WAS A CALL FROM SOMEONE CALLED *OZAKI*.
...WILL FINALLY BE BROUGHT TO LIGHT.
NOW THE MEMORIES OF THIS THING EMBEDDED INSIDE ME...
...IT'S TIME.
SO...

IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH YOUR LEFT HAND?
I INJURED IT DURING A BATTLE.
...
SORRY TO TAKE YOU AWAY FROM YOUR DUTIES.
ALL RIGHT. LET'S GET TO THE TOPIC AT HAND.
THE SCARS OF A HERO, ARE THEY?
WELL...
HOW MUCH DO YOU ALREADY KNOW?
I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU THE NIGHT YOU MET THE NAVY PILOT.

...DEVELOPED SEVERE BURN-LIKE WOUNDS ON HIS BODY AS IF HE'D BEEN EXPOSED TO HIGH LEVELS OF ULTRA-VIOLET WAVES.
THE CORPORAL DRIVING THE CAR...
"...DIED SHORTLY AFTER, DURING AN AIR RAID.
...THE SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MILITARY POLICE FORCE...
"BY THE TIME THE DOCTOR INFORMED ME, IT WAS TOO LATE."
"HE THOUGHT THAT IT WAS SOME SORT OF SKIN DISEASE AND WENT TO THE BASE PHYSICIAN. INSTEAD OF GETTING BETTER, HIS CONDITION SEEMED TO WORSEN WITH EACH DAY.
HONESTLY, I DON'T REMEMBER.
I DON'T KNOW.
TOO LATE?
HE DIED TWO DAYS AGO. THE CAUSE OF DEATH IS INCONCLUSIVE. A COMPLETE MYSTERY.
WHAT HAPPENED OUT THERE?

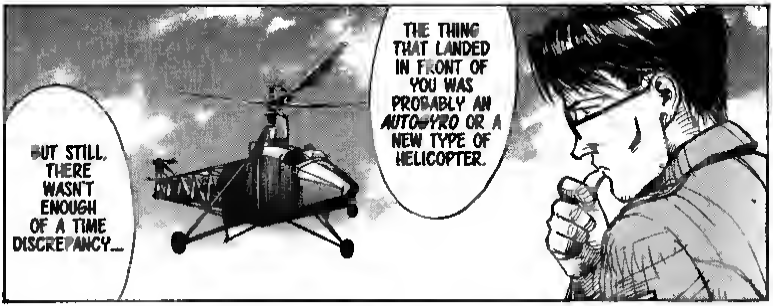
HYPNOSIS IS NOT A PARLOR TRICK OR SOME SIDESHOW ACT, BUT A REAL SCIENCE.
DO YOU MEAN CLAIR-VOYANCE ?
THMP
HYPNOSIS ?
HYPNOSIS IS BELIEVED TO BE A CONDITION ACHIEVED BY EXTERNAL STIMULI. BY USING AN OBJECT TO FOCUS THE PARTICIPANT'S ATTENTION, A SLEEP-LIKE TRANCE IS INDUCED, ENABLING ONE TO RECOLLECT EVENTS IN THEIR SUBCONSCIOUS.
SNCH
YOU WERE MOST LIKELY KIDNAPPED AND PLACED IN A SIMILAR STATE, SOMETHING LIKE INDUCED SLEEP-WALKING.
THE ONLY WAY TO RETRIEVE YOUR MEMORIES *LOCKED AWAY* BY HYPNOTIC SUGGESTION IS TO PLACE YOU IN A SIMILAR TRANCE TO DRAW THEM BACK OUT.
FOLLOW THE COIN WITH YOUR EYES.
YOUR EYELIDS ARE GETTING HEAVIER....
NOW, LET'S GO BACK TO THAT NIGHT...

THE CAR IS MOVING ALONG THE ROAD...
ANY-THING OUT OF THE ORDINARY ?
SOME-THING DARK IS FLYING NEAR US....
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?
IT LANDS IN FRONT OF US.
"LANDS" ...?
BACK UP! GO!
VWNNNN

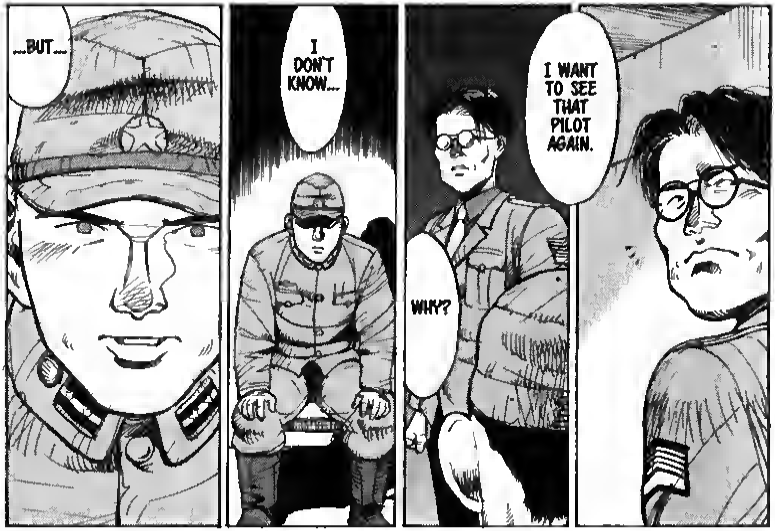
...I CAN'T SEE...
...SO BRIGHT...
A LIGHT...
AND THEN WHAT?
I WAKE UP.
DO YOU SEE ANY-THING?
THERE ARE PEOPLE ...
WHO ARE THEY?!
SMALL...
...LIKE CHILDREN.

STRANGE ...
WHAT KIND OF SMELL IS IT?
SMELLS BAD...
...LIKE SMELLING A DOG ON A RAINY DAY...
I CAN'T TELL...
WHAT SORT?
THERE ARE MANY CHILDREN HERE...
THE SERGEANT MAJOR IS TIED DOWN, AND THE CHILDREN ARE DOING SOMETHING TO HIM.
DO YOU SEE THE OTHER SOLDIERS?
SER-GEANT MAJOR !!
SERGEANT MAJOR!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! RELEASE HIM!
WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

THMP
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
A WIN-DOW...
...THERE'S A ROUND WINDOW.
ROUND WINDOW? A SHIP'S PORTHOLE?!
OUTSIDE THE WINDOW. I SEE...
WHAT? WHAT DO YOU SEE?!


THE THING THAT LANDED IN FRONT OF YOU WAS PROBABLY AN AUTOGYRO OR A NEW TYPE OF HELICOPTER.
BUT STILL, THERE WASN'T ENOUGH OF A TIME DISCREPANCY...

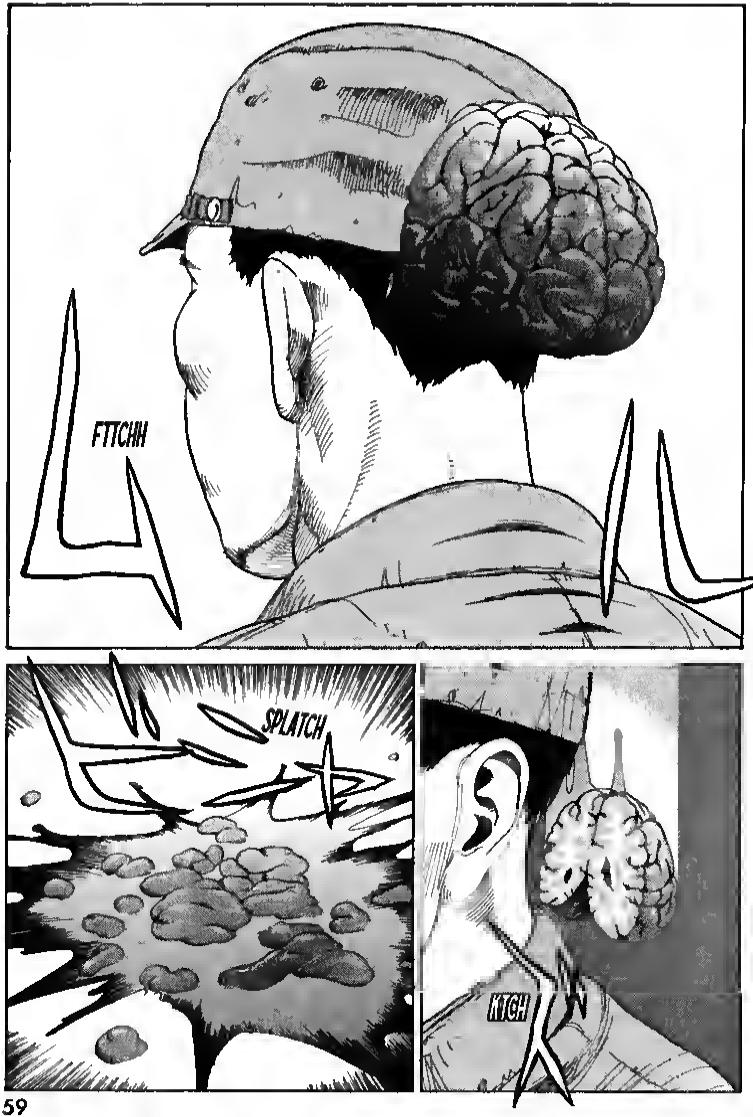
MR. OZAKI.
I'VE ACCEPTED ALL OF YOUR REQUESTS SO FAR. I WOULD LIKE YOU TO AGREE TO ONE OF MINE.


I WANT TO SEE THAT PILOT AGAIN.
WHY?
I DON'T KNOW...
...BUT...

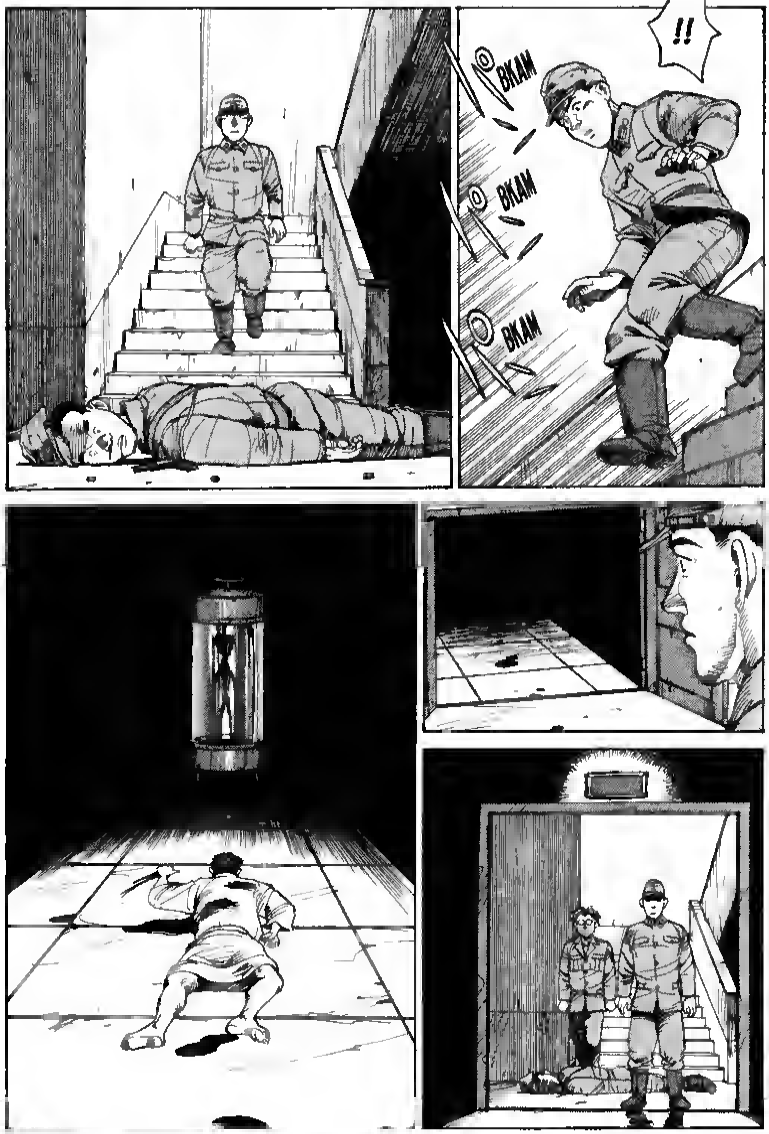
...I KNOW THAT I HAVE TO SEE HIM.
?!
SO YOU'RE HERE.

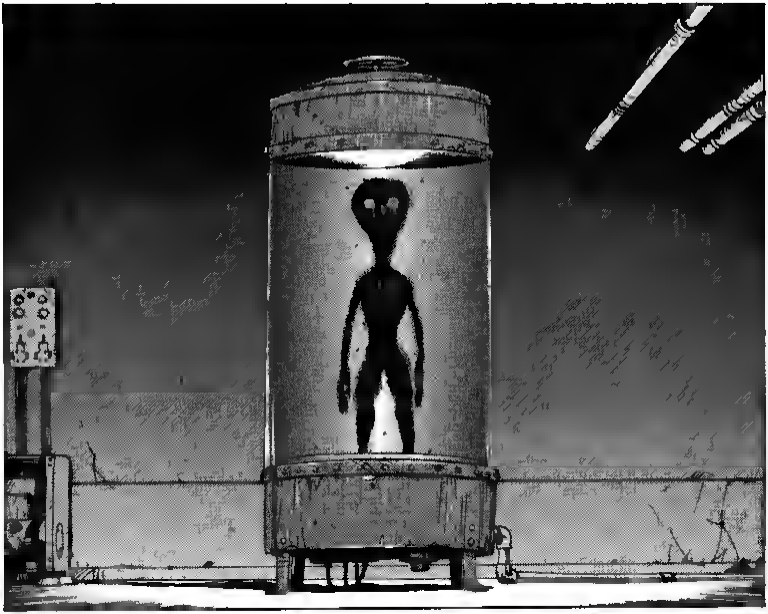
!
NOW MY NEW WORK CAN BEGIN.
...?
THE HEAVENS...
...THE HEAVENS...
...ARE LARGER THAN YOU THINK.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
FMPP
TMP


FTTCHH
SPLATCH
KYCH

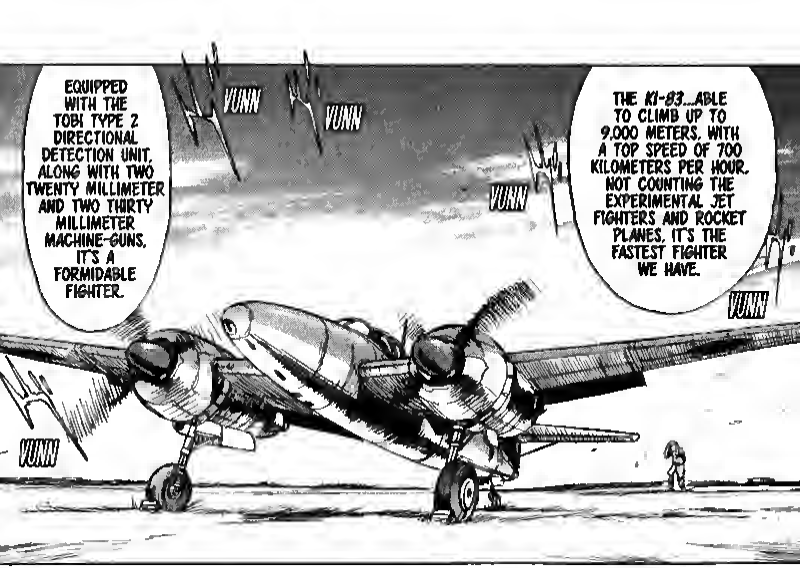
KATHMP
STOP HIM!
TMP TMP
!!
TAK TAK TAK
DON'T LET HIM GET TO THE BASE-MENT!


!!
BKAM
BKAM
BKAM



THEY ARE THE SIZE OF SMALL APES, AND THEIR DIGESTIVE SYSTEM IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF A *FISH*.
THE AMERICANS ARE USING THESE CREATURES AS PILOTS.
THIS IS A BIOLOGICAL WEAPON WE RECOVERED FROM THE *LUMINESCENT OBJECT* YOU SHOT DOWN.
WHAT IS IT...?!

SPEAK TO NO ONE ABOUT WHAT YOU SAW HERE.
LIEUTENANT KITAYAMA.
FLINCH
WE CAN DETAIN YOU HERE AS WELL.
APRIL 1945...
WE'RE NOT TESTING.
CAPTAIN, SIR. DIDN'T WE COMPLETE TESTING ON THIS UNIT LAST YEAR?
?

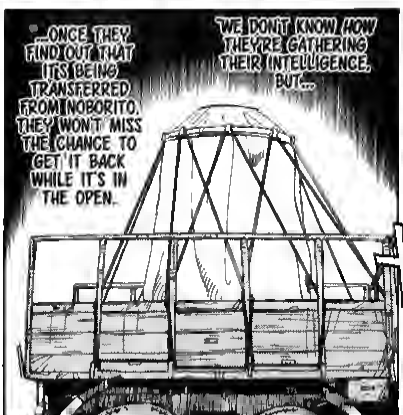

EQUIPPED WITH THE TOBI TYPE 2 DIRECTIONAL DETECTION UNIT, ALONG WITH TWO TWENTY MILLIMETER AND TWO THIRTY MILLIMETER MACHINE-GUNS, IT'S A FORMIDABLE FIGHTER.
VUNN
VUNN
VUNN
VUNN
VUNN
THE KI-83...ABLE TO CLIMB UP TO 9,000 METERS, WITH A TOP SPEED OF 700 KILOMETERS PER HOUR. NOT COUNTING THE EXPERIMENTAL JET FIGHTERS AND ROCKET PLANES, IT'S THE FASTEST FIGHTER WE HAVE.

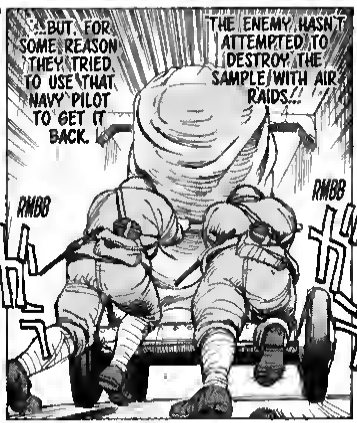
WE'RE GOING TO USE IT TO *CAPTURE* A LUMINESCENT OBJECT.

?!
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THE ARMY CHOSE NOT TO PUT IT INTO REGULAR SERVICE.

WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO WITH THIS?

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!
WELL--
HOW?
LET ME PILOT THAT PLANE.
FOR YOUR MISSION TO SUCCEED, YOU'LL NEED A PILOT WHO HAS THE ABILITY TO CHASE AND SHOOT DOWN ONE OF THOSE "LUMINESCENT OBJECTS"...!
YOU RUN THE RISK OF BEING CONTROLLED BY THE ENEMY...LIKE THAT NAVY PILOT. YOU COULD ATTEMPT TO SABOTAGE OUR MISSION.
ALL RIGHT, THEN. HOWEVER ---
AND BESIDES, IF I WERE BEING CONTROLLED, THEY WOULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING BY NOW.
...
WHAT BETTER CHOICE FOR A PILOT THAN ME, THE MAN WHO'S FACED ONE BEFORE?

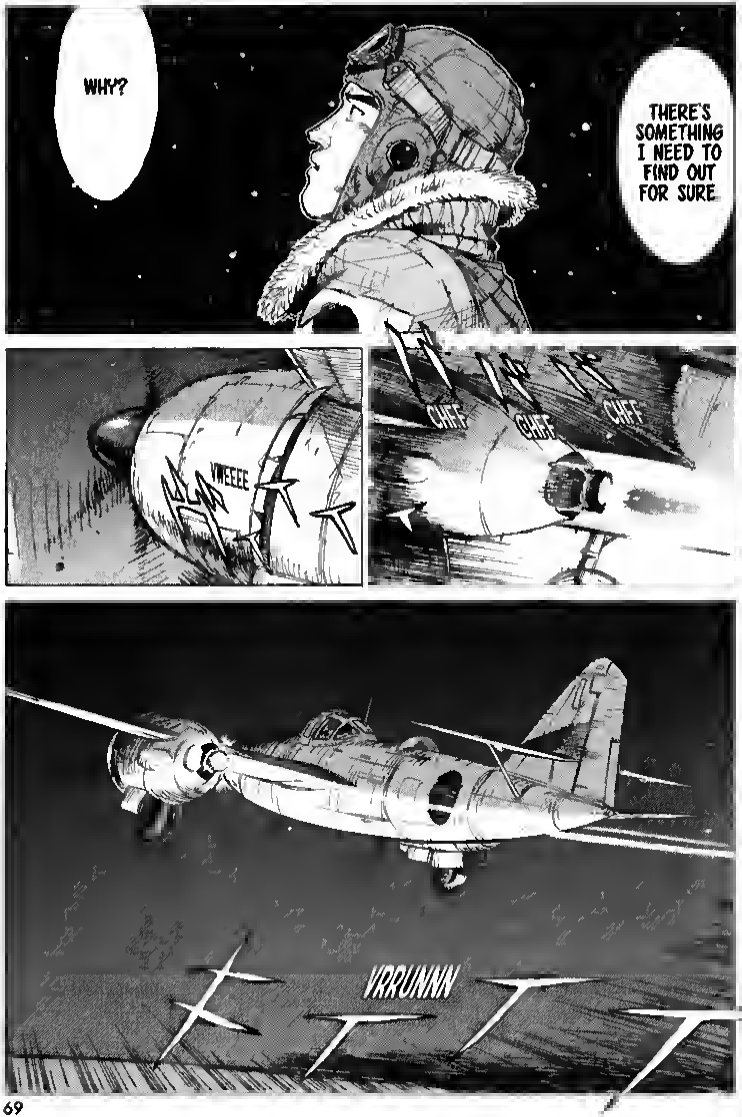

...ONCE THEY FIND OUT THAT ITS BEING TRANSFERRED FROM NOBORITO, THEY WON'T MISS THE CHANCE TO GET IT BACK WHILE IT'S IN THE OPEN.
WE DON'T KNOW HOW THEY'RE GATHERING THEIR INTELLIGENCE, BUT...


...BUT, FOR SOME REASON THEY TRIED TO USE THAT NAVY PILOT TO GET IT BACK.
THE ENEMY HASN'T ATTEMPTED TO DESTROY THE SAMPLE WITH AIR RAIDS...
RMBB
RMBB

TAMA RESEARCH SHORT FOR THE TAMA ARMY RESEARCH FACILITY, WHICH WAS MAINLY USED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RADIO WAVE AND ELECTRONIC DETECTION EQUIPMENT.

"THE AMERICANS ARE SURE TO USE ONE OF THEIR AERIAL WEAPONS TO RETRIEVE THAT BIOLOGICAL WEAPON.
WE MUST CHANGE THE TIDE OF THIS WAR! TO STRENGTHEN OUR MIGHT WE HAVE TO GET OUR HANDS ON THEIR AERIAL WEAPON!
"THE AREA AROUND TACHIKAWA WILL BE COVERED BY DETECTION EQUIPMENT, WHICH WILL DIRECT THE KI-83.
"WE PLAN TO SET UP AN AMBUSH TO CAPTURE IT.
"...ALONG WITH OTHER GROUND ASSAULT FORCES."
"A TANK BATTALION WILL COVER THE SURFACE...
THE FUTURE OF OUR EMPIRE DEPENDS ON THIS MISSION!
BAMM

YOU NEEDN'T DIE ALONG WITH ME.
WE PROBABLY WON'T BE ABLE TO COME BACK FROM THIS MISSION ALIVE.
I'LL STICK WITH YOU! I'LL DIE WITH YOU!
LISTEN... WHEN I ORDER YOU TO DO SO, I WANT YOU TO EJECT.
HUH?
THEN WHY ARE YOU GOING LIEUTENANT?
ARE THEY BRITISH?
THE ENEMY WE'RE FACING... THEY AREN'T AMERICANS. THERE'S NO REASON FOR US TO EVEN FIGHT THEM.
EITHER WAY, YOU NEED NOT RISK YOUR LIFE FOR THIS.
NO.
THEY MAY NOT EVEN BE AN ENEMY.


WHY?
THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO FIND OUT FOR SURE
VWEEEE
CHEF
CHEF
CHEF
VRRUNNN

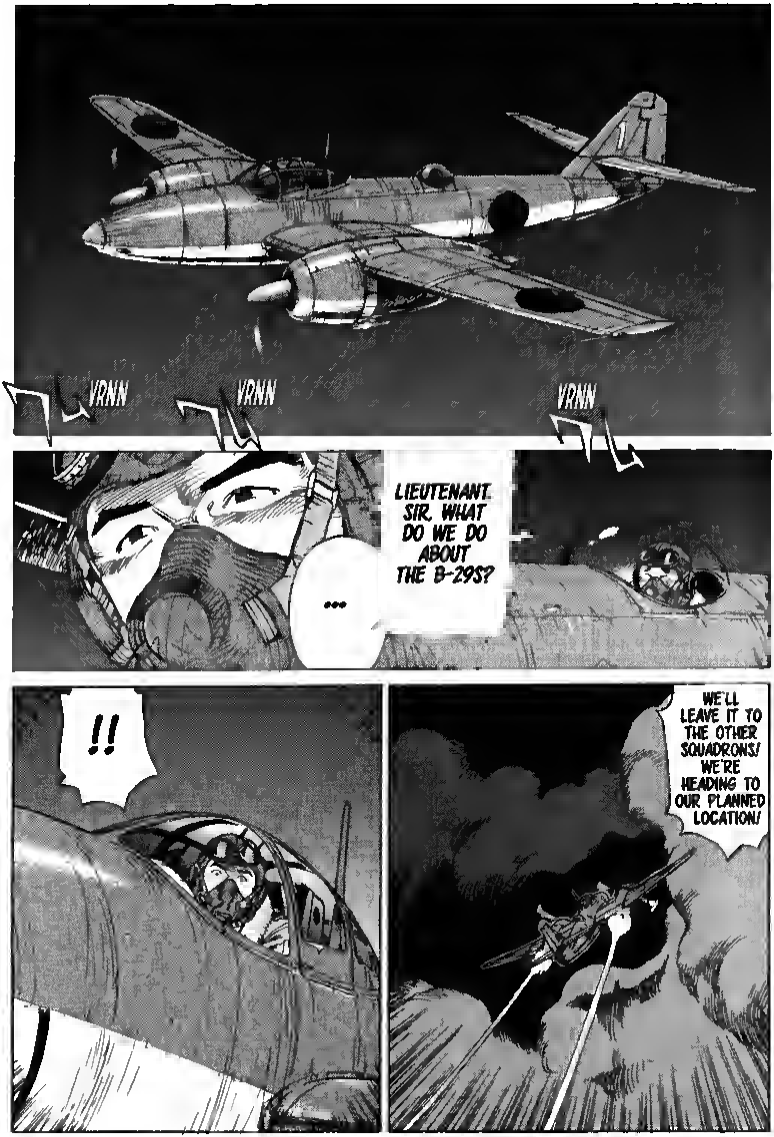
GOOD.
WE'VE PLACED THE 50K! AA GUNS AS REQUESTED.
...
MOVE OUT!
RMBB
BRMMB
BRMMB

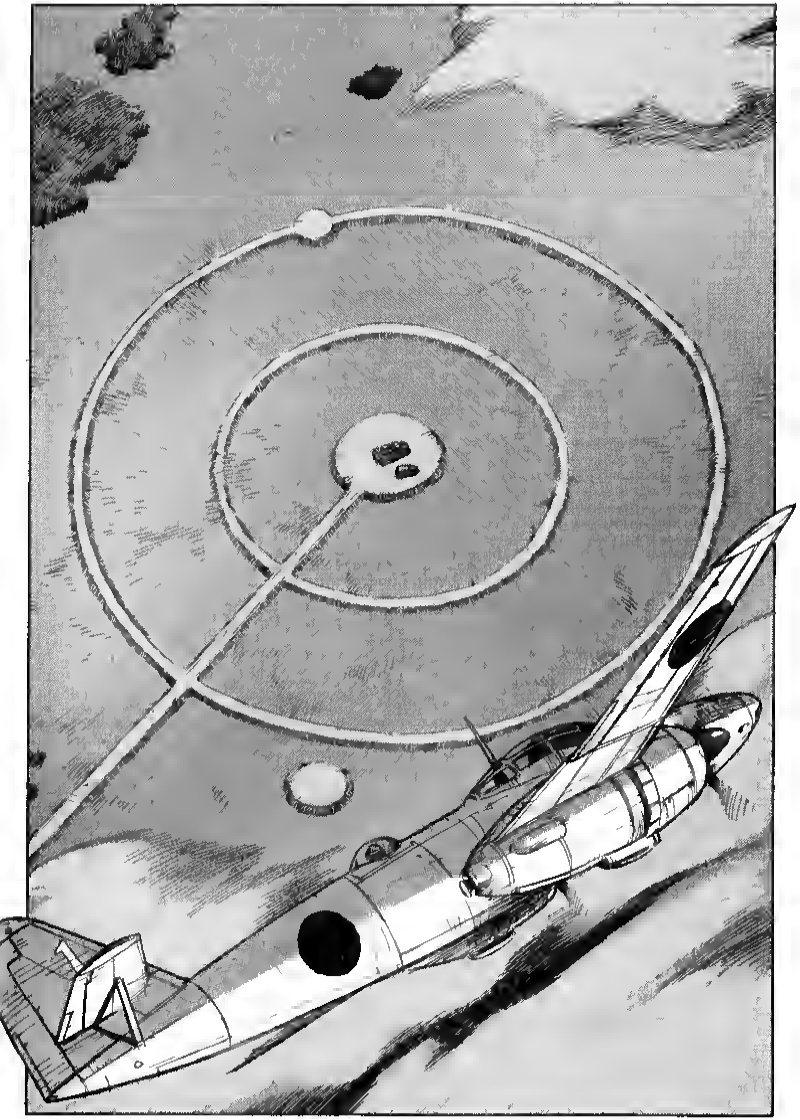
VMMM
VMMM
VMMM
COME ON. SHOW YOUR-SELF!
SHOULD BE SOON.
150 LARGE ENEMY PLANES ARE HEADED NORTH TOWARD TOKYO!
AN AIR RAID WARNING HAS JUST BEEN SOUNDED!
LIEU-TENANT, SIR!
WHAT ?!

OUR PRIMARY TARGET IS THE TACHIKAWA AIRCRAFT FACTORY. AND...
...THAT "BALL OF FIRE" YOU SAW WENT DOWN NEAR THERE, CORRECT?
YES, SIR.
IS THAT "BALL OF FIRE" THING SO IMPORTANT?
YES.
ONCE THIS WAR IS OVER...
...THEY COULD BECOME OUR NEXT ENEMY.

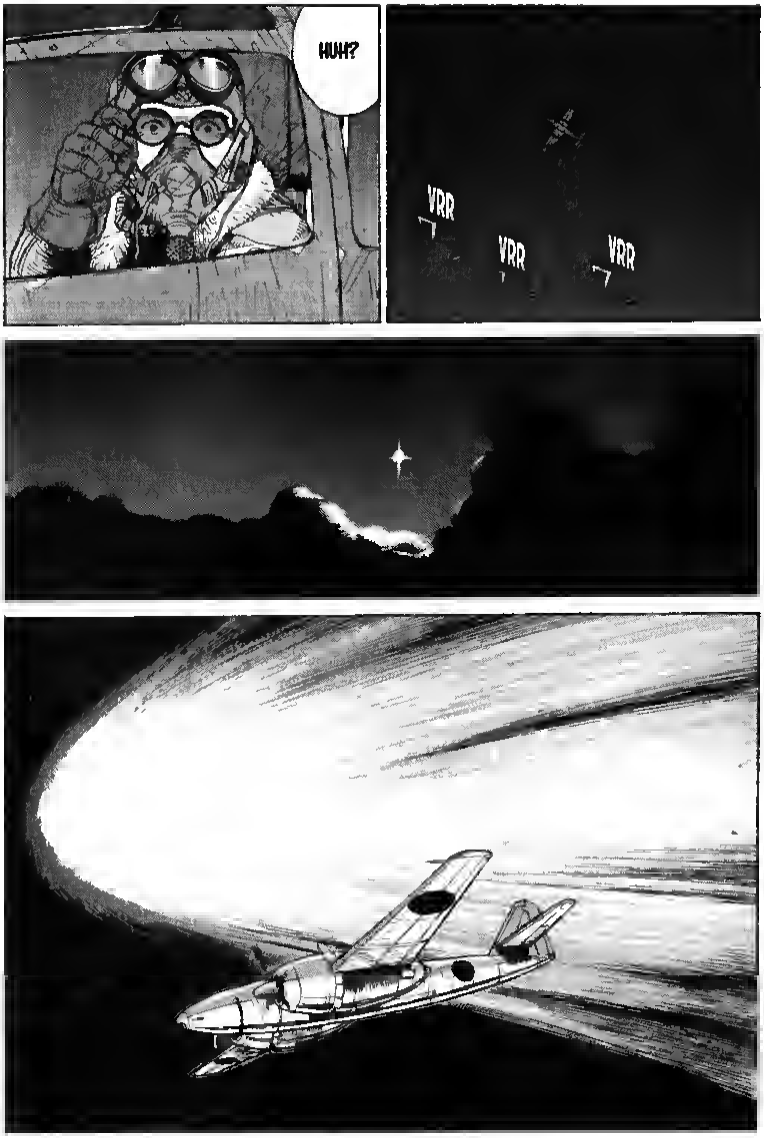
VRMM
BRMMB
BRMMB
FWOOSH
!!
SHOULD BE ABOUT--
KREEE

KACHOKK
WAIT! DON'T SHOOT!
STILL TOO EARLY...
HWEEEE


VRNN
VRNN
VRNN
LIEUTENANT. SIR. WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THE B-29S?
...
!!
WE'LL LEAVE IT TO THE OTHER SQUADRONS! WE'RE HEADING TO OUR PLANNED LOCATION!

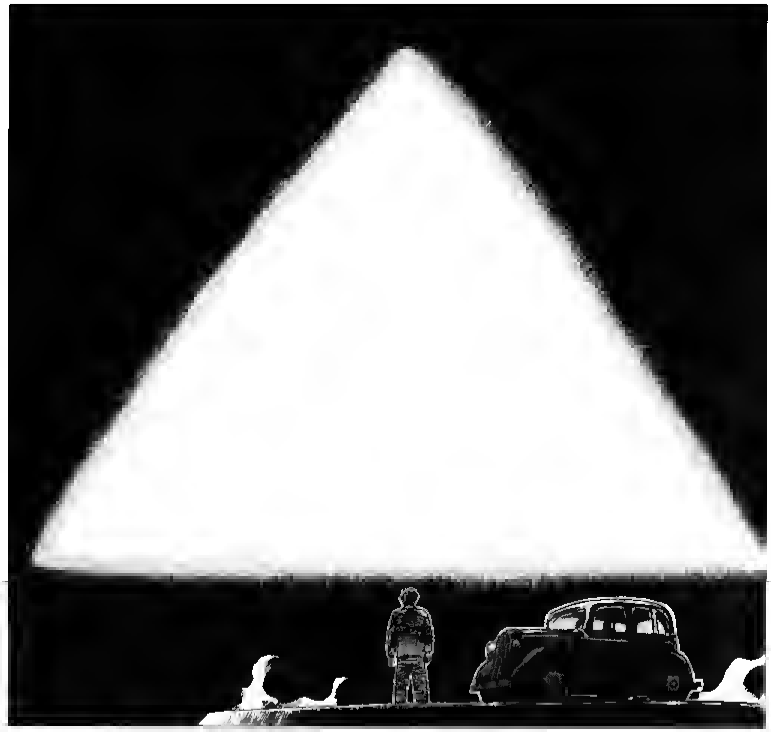


"JUST AS I SUSPECTED-- HE KNEW!"
"THAT'S OZAKI...!


HUH?
VRR
VRR
VRR

KZZT
KZZT
KZZT
LIEU-
TENANT?!
ZZTCH
ZZTCH
ZZTCH
ZZTCH
AHH!
IT'S
HERE...

FWOOOMP
!!



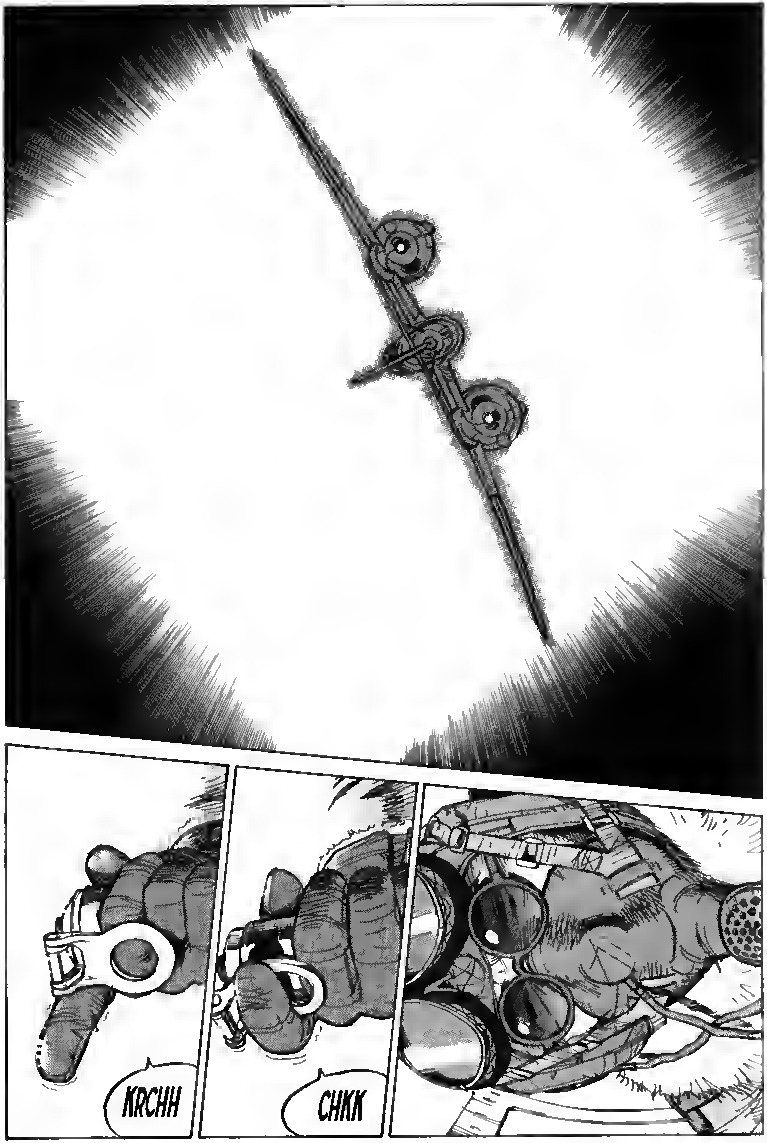
SHOOT IT!
AH!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
KPAMM
KPAMM
KPAMM
EEEE
EEEE
EEEE
?!

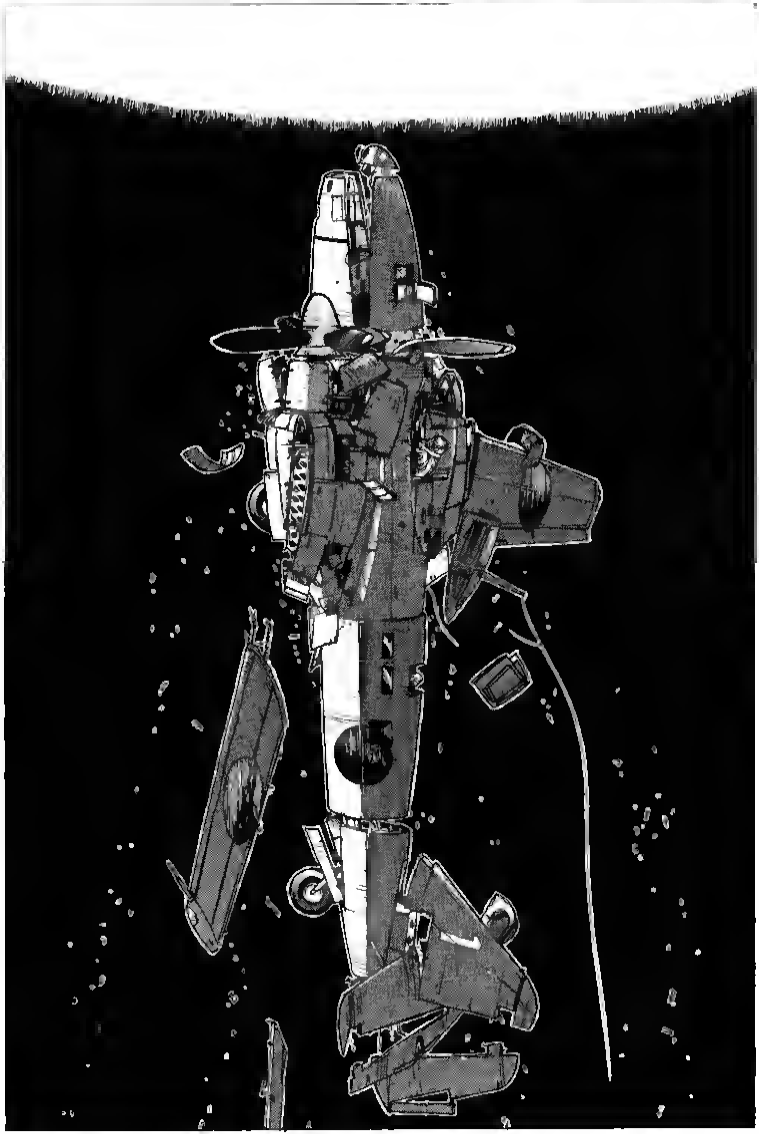
EEEE
EEEE
EEEEEE
EEEE
FWSHH
YAAH!
FZZZT
FZZZT
SHOOM

IT CAN'T BE!
WHAT?
HRGKK...!
?!
AAGH!
AAGH!
AAGH!

UUH...
POKK
POKK
POKK
FIRE !!
THOOM
THOOM
THOOM
THOOM

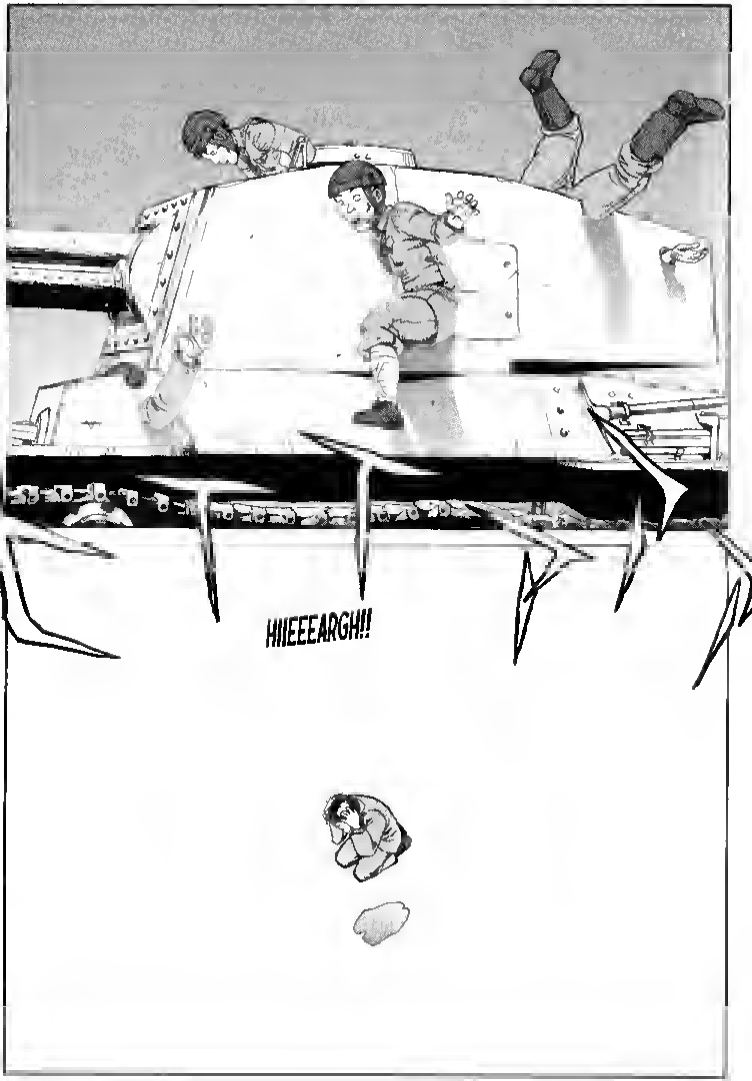
CORPORAL! EJECT NOW!
SO IT'S BEGUN.
...
I WON'T OBEY THAT ORDER!
I SAID-- EJECT NOW!
NO, SIR!
DON'T SAY I DIDN'T WARN YOU...


KRCHH
CHKK



SKREEE
EEEEE

EEEE
YAAAAAAH!!


HIIEEEARGH!!

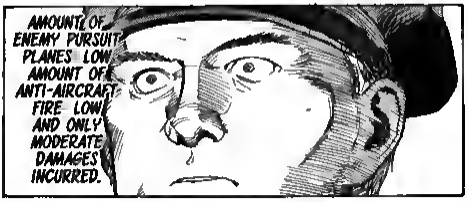
VEEEE
VEEEE
THAT'S...?
?!
?!
MR. OZAKI.
HFF
HFF
HFF
HFF

?!
LIEU-TENANT... KITA-YAMA?
WHY ARE YOU HERE...?
CAN YOU POSSIBLY UNDER-STAND...?
I THOUGHT SO!
YOU ARE A SPY!

...THE FOOLISH ACTIONS OF US ALL ARE NOTHING BUT THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE...
YOURS... AND OURS...
WAIT!
I HAVE TO GO.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
WHAT'S THIS ABOUT "THE FUTURE" ...?!

IF YOU DON'T, I'LL SHOOT!

THE WORLD IS ONE.
AND HOW YOU VIEW THIS WORLD...
...IS UP TO YOU.



APRIL 1945...

MISSION #57
(CODE NAME: MODELER NO. 1)
TARGET: TACHIKAWA AIRCRAFT FACTORY, TACHIKAWA CITY
90.17-792

COMPLEMENT: 73RD AIR SQUADRON
NUMBER OF PLANES: 113
DESTRUCTION OF PRIMARY TARGET: 54%

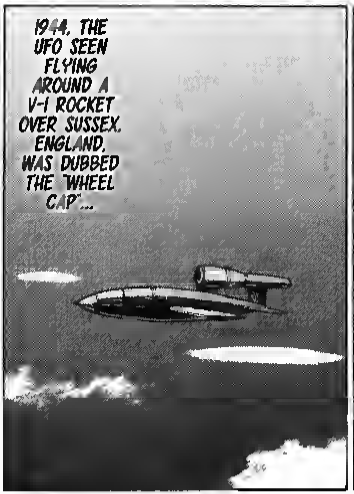
HOWEVER, THE TRAILING PLANES REPORTED SEEING A "BALL OF FIRE."

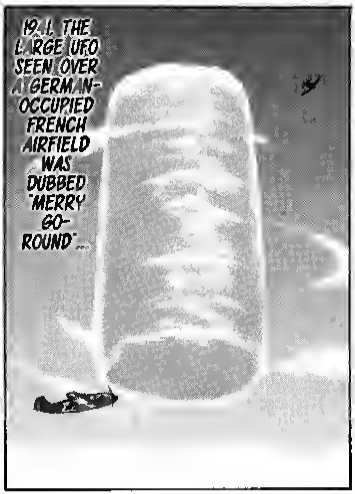
...THIS IS FIRST LIEUTENANT TOWNSEND OF AMERICAN ARMY INTELLI-GENCE.
MISTER OZAKI...
SEPTEMBER 1945...NUMBER ONE LIFE INSURANCE BUILDING, CHIYODA-KU, TOKYO GHQ...(GENERAL HEADQUARTERS OF THE SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE ALLIED POWERS)
DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING REGARDING THIS MATTER?
...
ON THE EVENING OF APRIL 4TH, WE WITNESSED A LARGE UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT OVER THE SKIES OF TACHIKAWA.
SO YOU HAVE BEEN RESEARCHING THE "WHO FIGHTER"...WHAT YOU CALLED A "LUMINESCENT OBJECT" AT THE NOMORITO FACILITY, CORRECT?
FWSH
WE WERE STARTING TO TH-THINK THE M-MISSION WAS A SUCCESS... H-HOWEVER...
?!
ON THAT DAY, WE WERE ON A MISSION TO LURE OUT THE FLYING OBJECT.
M.P.

THAT OBJECT C-C-CANNOT BE AN AMERICAN SECRET W-WEAPON. IT WAS WAS WAS WAS...HRRGG... ARGGH...
W-W-WE FOUND IT LARGER THAN E-EXPECTED, AND IT P-POSSESSED A POWERFUL WEAPON.
SIT DOWN!
!!
SHUMPP
WHISH
MP

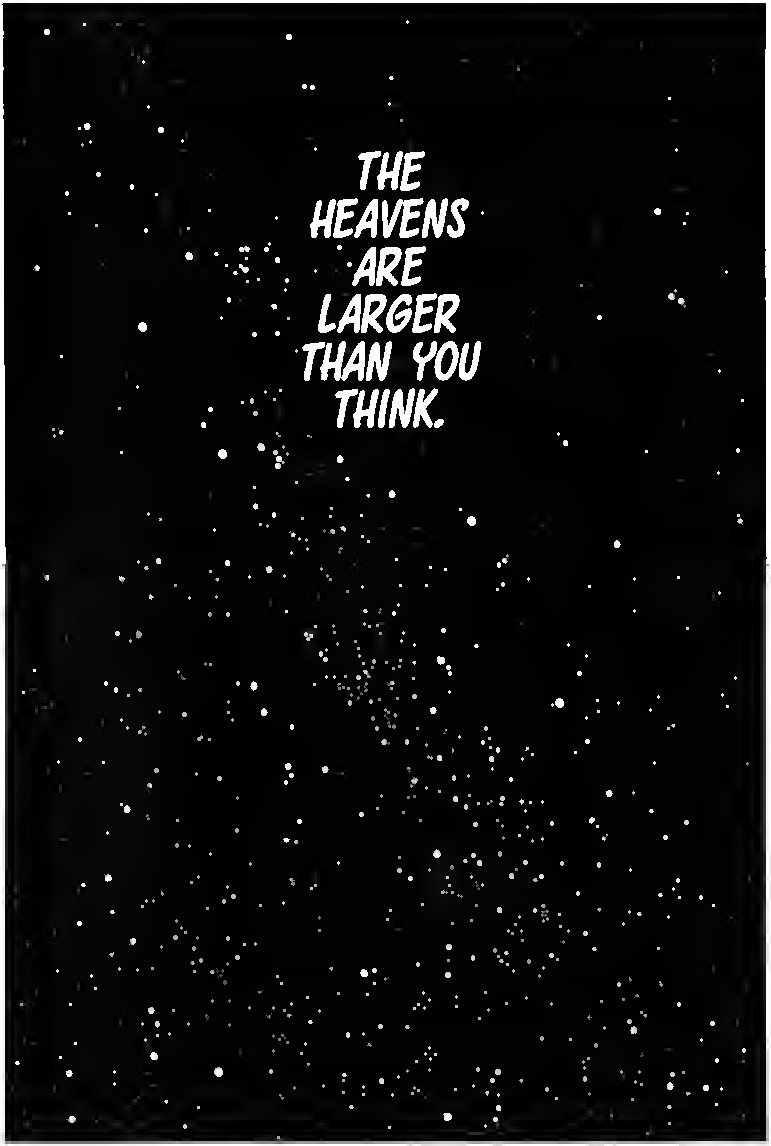
FREEZE!
?!

BKAMM


1944, THE UFO SEEN FLYING AROUND A V-1 ROCKET OVER SUSSEX, ENGLAND, WAS DUBBED THE "WHEEL CAP"...


1944, THE LARGE UFO SEEN OVER A GERMAN-OCCUPIED FRENCH AIRFIELD WAS DUBBED "MERRY GO-ROUND"...

THE REAL IDENTITY OF THE "WHO FIGHTERS" SEEN IN VARIOUS NATIONS DURING WORLD WAR II HAS NEVER BEEN RESOLVED.


THE HEAVENS ARE LARGER THAN YOU THINK.

REFERENCES:

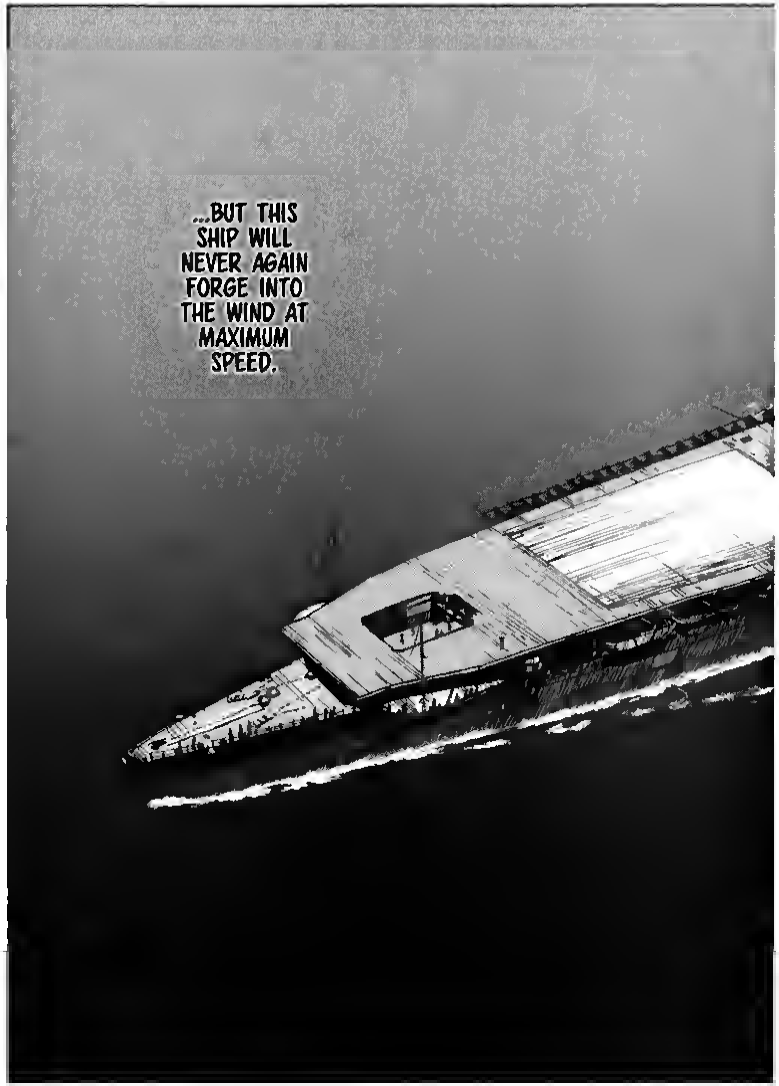
ALIEN BASE: THE EVIDENCE FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL COLONIZATION OF EARTH
by Timothy Good

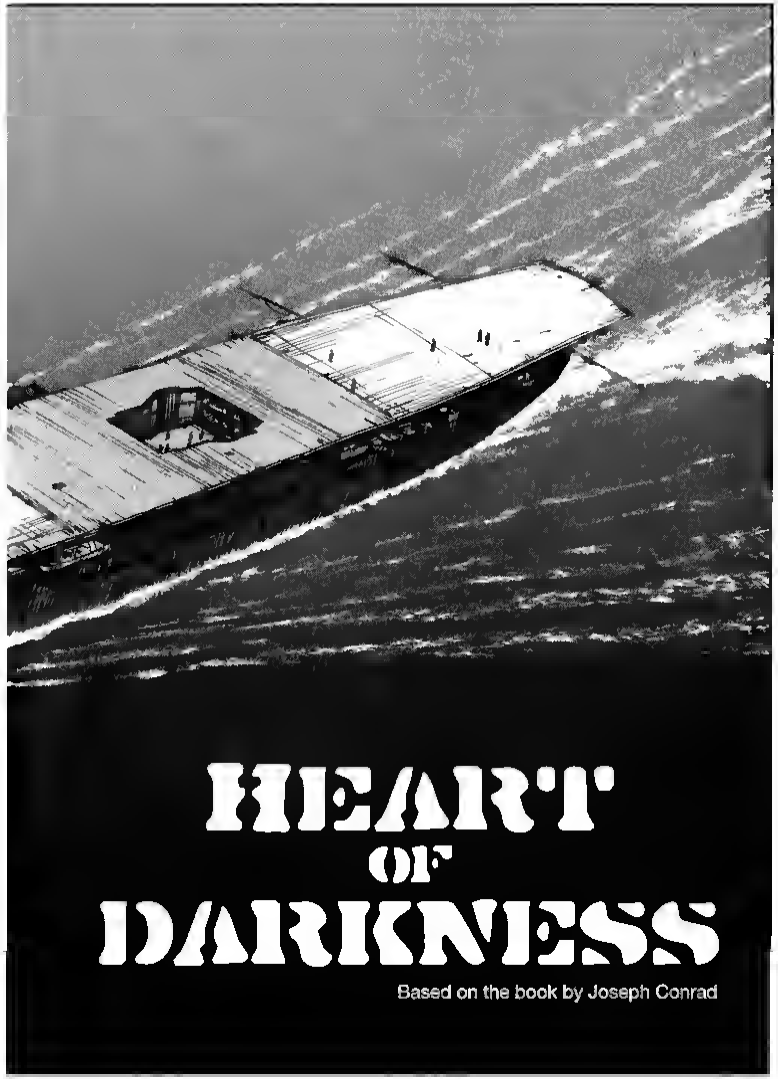
ALIEN DAWN
by Colin Wilson

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES
by John A. Keel

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ARMY NOBORITO RESEARCH INSTITUTE
(*Rikugun Noborito Kenkyujo no Shinjitsu*)
by Shigeo Ban

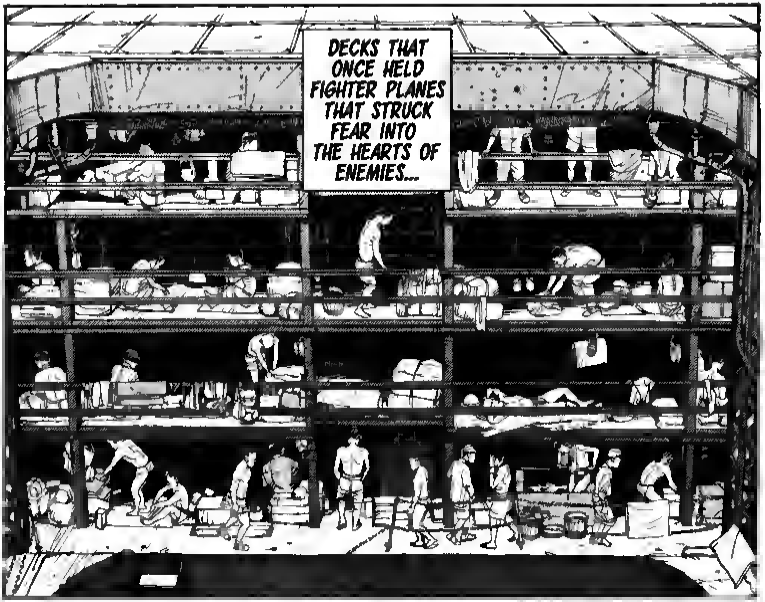
AT ONE TIME, THIS SHIP WAS PART OF A GREAT FLEET, WHICH HAD TRAVELED ACROSS THE SEAS TO INFORM THE WORLD OF AN EMPIRE'S DIGNITY...
A LARGE SHIP QUIETLY MOVES ALONG. WHERE THE WORLD ONCE FOUGHT A GREAT BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF THE SEAS.





HEART OF DARKNESS

Based on the book by Joseph Conrad


DECKS THAT ONCE HELD FIGHTER PLANES THAT STRUCK FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF ENEMIES...

...A TALE OF SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED AT THE END OF THE EARTH.
AMONGST THEM WAS A MAN WHO BEGAN TO TELL A TALE TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR...

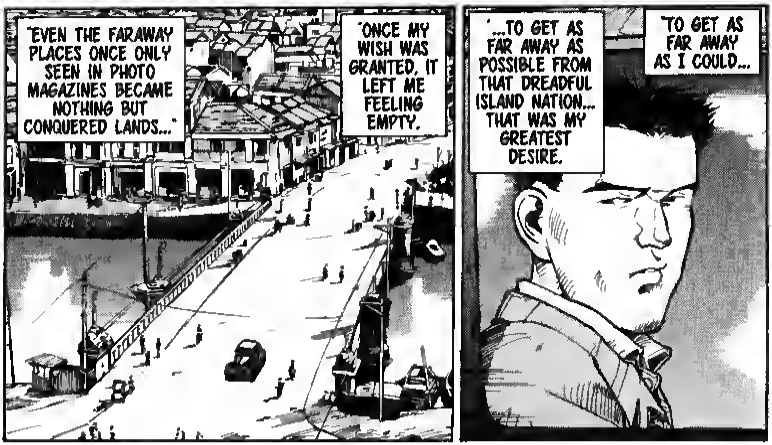
...LYING ABOUT LISTLESSLY.
...WERE NOW FILLED WITH WORN-OUT SOLDIERS ON THE RETREAT...

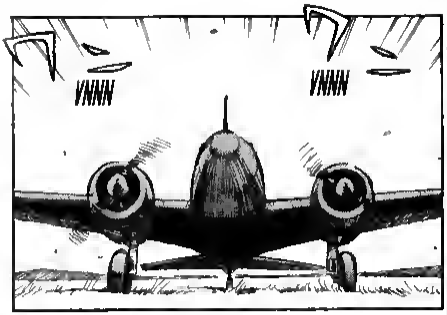
1944,
RAFFLES HOTEL,
SINGAPORE...
...
NOD
FWSH
KCHIKK
FIRST LIEUTENANT MARUO!
FIRST LIEUTENANT MARUO!

SNRFF
ZZZNN
ZZZNN
ZZZNN
ZZZNN
ARE YOU SURE THIS IS THE RIGHT MAN?
SUPPOSEDLY. HE'S A SPECIALIST IN STRATEGIC COMBAT.
HFF
BRUMBB
BRUMBB

"LIKE INSTRUCTIONS FOR A GEISHA, TELLING WHAT TO DO AND WHERE TO GO..."
"AS USUAL, THE ORDERS CAME SUDDENLY.

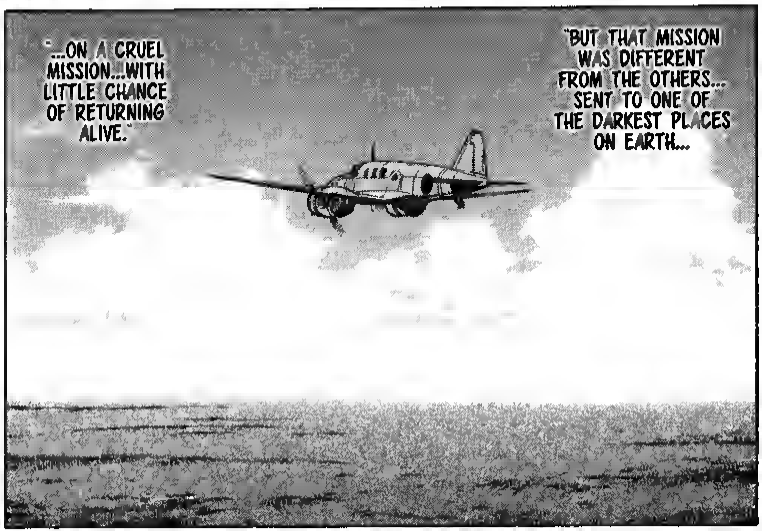
SMIRK
WAS I REALLY "ASLEEP"...?
WHERE ARE WE GOING? I HAVEN'T BEEN TOLD ANYTHING.
WE WERE SHORT ON TIME, SO WE MOVED YOU TO THE CAR WHILE YOU WERE STILL ASLEEP.

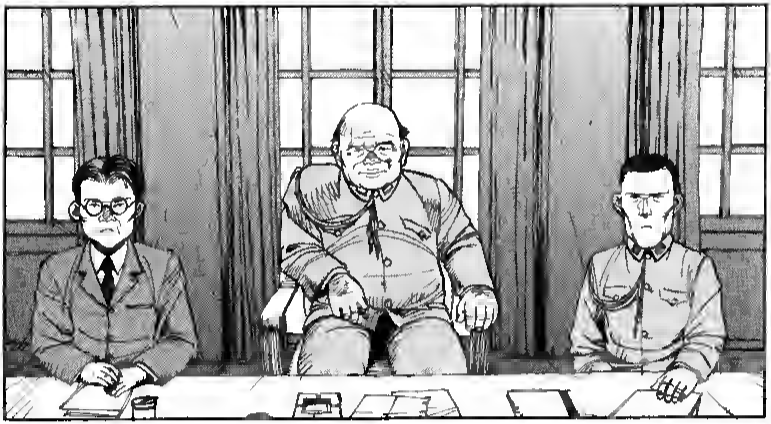

"EVEN THE FARAWAY PLACES ONCE ONLY SEEN IN PHOTO MAGAZINES BECAME NOTHING BUT CONQUERED LANDS..."
"ONCE MY WISH WAS GRANTED, IT LEFT ME FEELING EMPTY.
"...TO GET AS FAR AWAY AS POSSIBLE FROM THAT DREADFUL ISLAND NATION... THAT WAS MY GREATEST DESIRE.
"TO GET AS FAR AWAY AS I COULD...

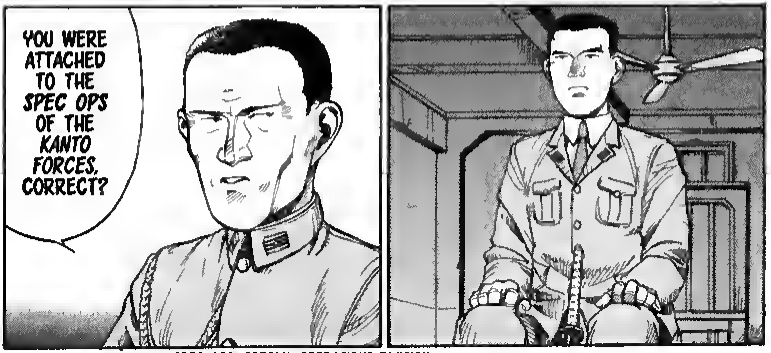

VNNN
VNNN

YOU'LL BE FLOWN FIRST TO BANGKOK AND THEN TO RANGOON.

BURMA. HUH...?


"...ON A CRUEL MISSION...WITH LITTLE CHANCE OF RETURNING ALIVE.
"BUT THAT MISSION WAS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS... SENT TO ONE OF THE DARKEST PLACES ON EARTH...

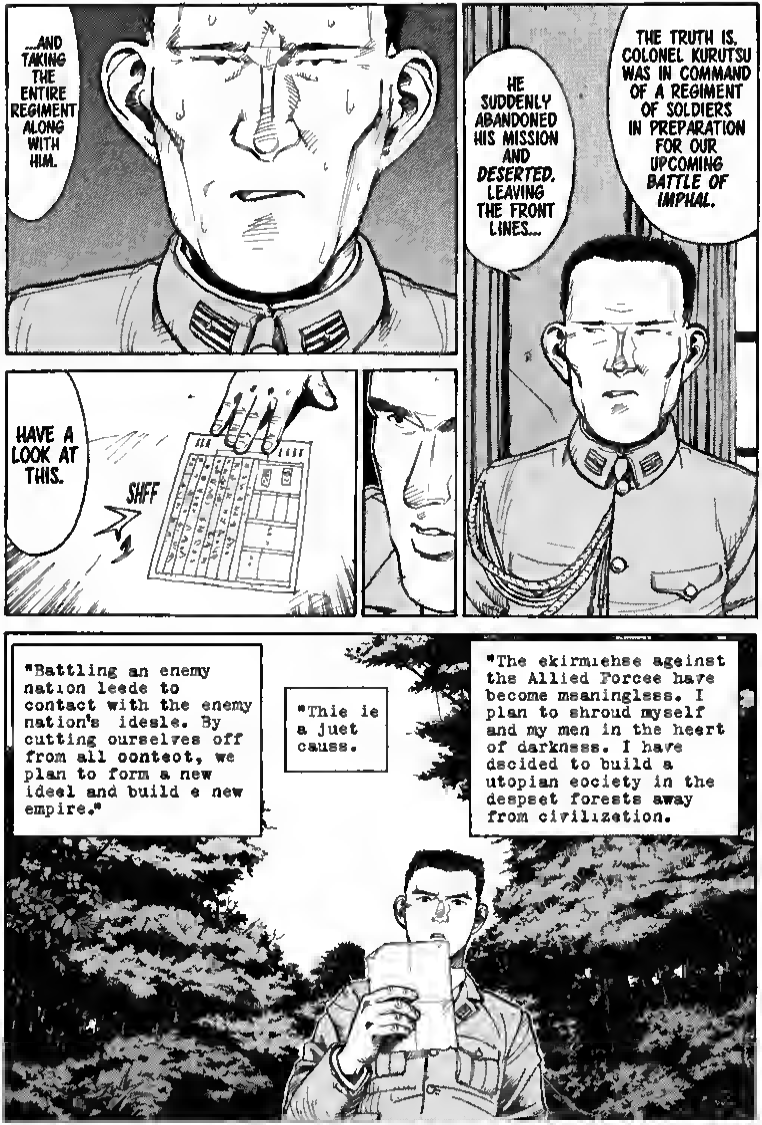




SPEC OPS SPECIAL OPERATIONS DIVISION.

I HEAR THAT SOME CALLED YOU "THE DAGGER OF HIGH CLASS STRATEGY." IS THAT TRUE?
YOUR PREVIOUS ORDERS WERE TO BUY AND TRADE OPIUM IN INNER MONGOLIA, AS WELL AS DEALING WITH CERTAIN POLITICAL FIGURES IN THAT GOVERNMENT.
I RESPECTFULLY ASK TO REFRAIN FROM ANSWERING THAT QUESTION.
...DO YOU KNOW THIS MAN?
AS WE SUSPECTED.
IN ANY CASE...
?
FWIP

HE'S COLONEL KURUTSU.
HE'S A SOLDIER... A BRILLIANT SOLDIER WHO EARNED COUNTLESS MEDALS AND AWARDS DURING THE SECOND SINO-JAPANESE WAR...
YES, BUT IN NAME ONLY.
...
?
THAT HE WAS.

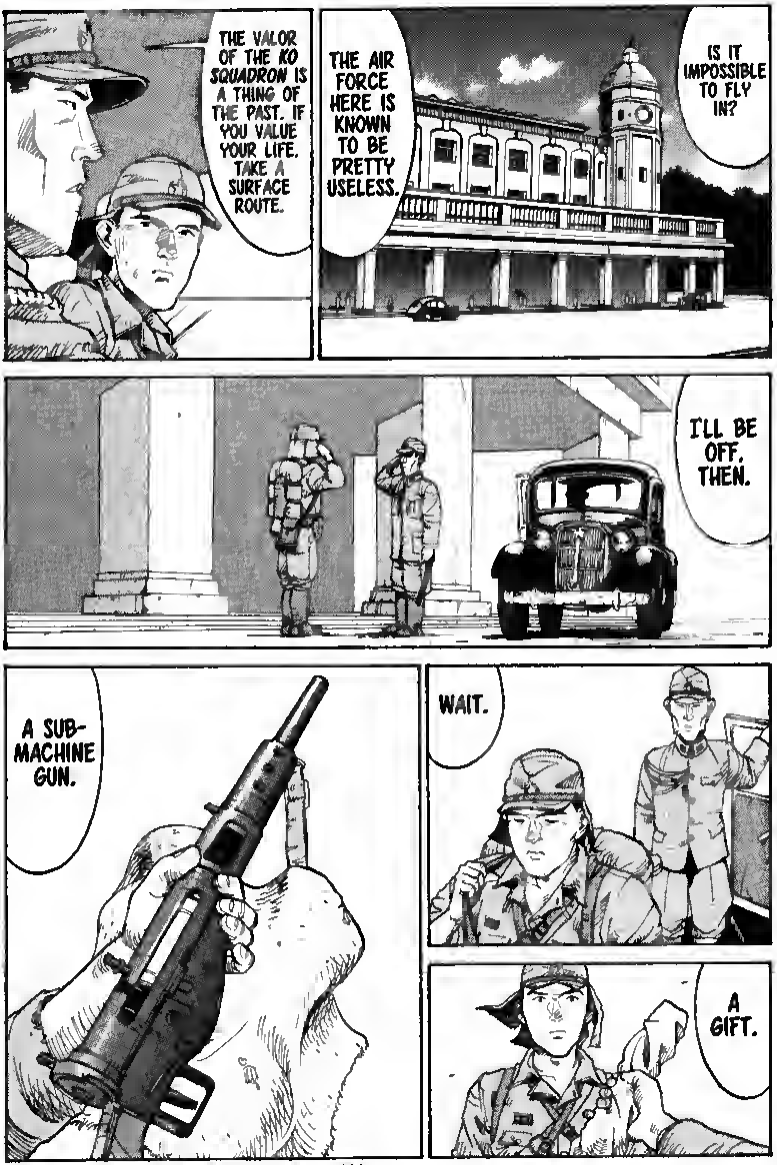

...AND TAKING THE ENTIRE REGIMENT ALONG WITH HIM.
HE SUDDENLY ABANDONED HIS MISSION AND *DESERTED*. LEAVING THE FRONT LINES...
THE TRUTH IS, COLONEL KURUTSU WAS IN COMMAND OF A REGIMENT OF SOLDIERS IN PREPARATION FOR OUR UPCOMING *BATTLE OF IMPHAL*.
HAVE A LOOK AT THIS.
SHFF
"Battling an enemy nation leede to contact with the enemy nation's idesle. By cutting ourselves off from all conteot, we plan to form a new ideel and build e new empire."
"Thie ie a juet causs.
"The ekirmiehse ageinst the Allied Forcee have become meaninglsss. I plan to shroud myself and my men in the heart of darknsss. I have dscided to build a utopian eociety in the despset forests away from civilizetion.

HE'S GONE MAD.
...
IT'S A TELEGRAM FROM THE COLONEL. SOME PARTS OF IT ARE ILLEGIBLE, BUT YOU GET THE GIST.
THIS IS ONLY MY OPINION. BUT MEN PLACED IN COMMAND OF OTHERS, HOLDING LIVES IN THEIR HANDS, WILL OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES UNABLE TO COPE WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY. HOWEVER...
ON THE FRONT LINES, IT'S NOT UNCOMMON FOR A SOLDIER TO SUFFER FROM NEUROSIS...BUT THIS IS OUT OF THE ORDINARY.
HE HAS FORGOTTEN THE FACT THAT THOSE MEN WERE PLACED IN HIS CARE BY THE EMPEROR.
I FEEL THAT HE'S SUCCUMBED TO THAT ALLURE.
...AT THE SAME TIME, THEY FIND A KIND OF PLEASURE IN THEIR POWER.
HE HAS ABANDONED HIS DUTIES AND IS NOW USING THE REGIMENT FOR HIS PERSONAL GOALS.
...

THE REGIMENT IS BELIEVED TO BE LOCATED IN THE UPPER REACHES OF THE SALWEEN RIVER.
...BUT WITHOUT TAKING AWAY HIS REAL COMMAND, IT'S MEANING-LESS.
THE COLONEL'S MILITARY COMMISSION HAS BEEN REVOKED...
...
YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR MISSION, DO YOU NOT?
EH?
I'VE HEARD THAT THE SITUATION HERE IN BURMA IS NOT EXACTLY FAVORABLE.
FWSH
WILL YOU BE SUPPLYING ME WITH "REAL AMMUNI-TION," AS WELL?
WITH THAT, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO WHAT'S NECESSARY, EVEN ON THE FRONT LINES.
WE WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH ORDERS STATING THAT YOU'RE ON A *SPECIAL MISSION* FOR THE GENERAL STAFF HEAD-QUARTERS.
SHF
SHF

IF I'M NOT PROVIDED WITH SOMETHING MORE EFFECTIVE THAN MARCHING ORDERS AND WAR NOTES, PROCEEDING WITH MY MISSION WILL BE DIFFICULT...
EVEN IN RANGOON, WITHOUT THE BACKING OF MATERIAL GOODS, WAR NOTES HAVE BECOME DEVALUED, AND INFLATION IS ON THE RISE.
USE IT AS YOU SEE FIT.
RIGHT HERE.
KNNCH
DON'T WORRY, WE'LL COVER YOUR COSTS.
FWSH
WHY DON'T YOU JOIN US AND RELAX?
SKFF
WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO SUIKOEN. HOW ABOUT IT?
YES, SIR.

"...THIS TIME...MY TARGET IS JAPANESE.
"MY MISSION. UP UNTIL NOW, HAS BEEN NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY. BUT...
"DID HIS MEN GO ALONG WITH HIS ORDERS WITHOUT COMPLAINT?
"COLONEL KURUTSU... WHAT KIND OF MAN IS HE?"
"A MAN CAPABLE OF TAKING AN ENTIRE REGIMENT AWAY FROM THE FRONT LINES TO FORM A UTOPIAN SOCIETY IN THE JUNGLES OF BURMA...?


THE VALOR OF THE KO SQUADRON IS A THING OF THE PAST. IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE, TAKE A SURFACE ROUTE.
THE AIR FORCE HERE IS KNOWN TO BE PRETTY USELESS.
IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO FLY IN?
I'LL BE OFF, THEN.
A SUB-MACHINE GUN.
WAIT.
A GIFT.

IF I DON'T RETURN, WILL YOU BE PRESSED TO SLIT YOUR BELLY OVER THIS INCIDENT?
THIS LEAVES NOTHING TO BE DESIRED.
ICHIMA
ONCE YOU'RE IN THE JUNGLE, YOU CAN'T GET BY WITH JUST A SWORD.
I HAVE FAITH IN YOU.
YOU SHOULDN'T CONCERN YOURSELF WITH THAT.
ARE YOU FIRST LIEUTENANT MARUO, SIR?
I'M SECOND LIEU-TENANT ODA.
BOOMMB
...

THE LINE TOWARD MITCHINA IS CUT OFF, BUT THE LINE TOWARD YUNNAN IS STILL OPERATIONAL, SOMEHOW.
WHAT'S THE SITUATION WITH THE RAIL-ROADS?
I'LL BE ACCOMPANY-ING YOU AS FAR AS KEMAPYU.
HAS ANYONE TOLD YOU ABOUT THE COLONEL?
NO.
YES.
IS THE FIRST LIEUTENANT FROM THE OTSU CLASS?
BEING A FELLOW GRADUATE OF THE NAKANO SCHOOL, HOW ABOUT YOU GIVE ME THE INSIDE STORY ...?
I'M FROM THE SHIGE CLASS.

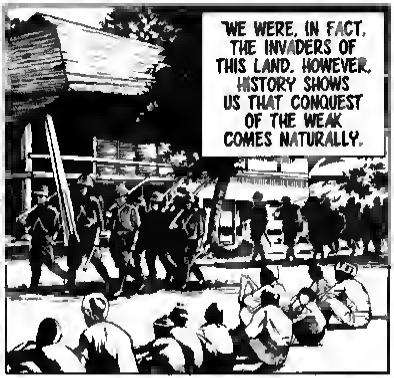
OTSU CLASS: OTSU ARE HIGHER-RANKING OFFICERS WHO HAVE GRADUATED FROM OFFICER TRAINING SCHOOL. SHIGE CLASS: LOWER-RANKING OFFICERS.

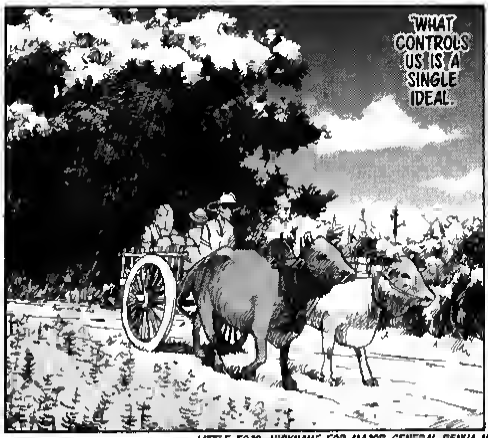
YOU ARE YOU.
カッ
FTT
IN A BATTLEFIELD. IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE.
CHHFFF
CHHFFF
THEY'RE ABLE TO GO HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH ENGLAND'S V FORCE AND KING SCOUTS. IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN A SIMPLE MISSION TO FIND ONE REGIMENT HIDING OUT IN THE JUNGLE.
WHY WAS SOMEONE LIKE ME CALLED IN? I'M SURE THERE ARE OFFICERS IN THE HIKARI ORGANIZATION WHO ARE BETTER SUITED AND MORE FAMILIAR WITH THE REGION.
ガー
KCHFF
ガー
KCHFF
IT SEEMS THAT MILITARY COMMAND HAS SENT OUT SEVERAL ATTACK TEAMS, BUT NONE HAVE RETURNED.
SO THEN... THEY'RE DOING THIS ON THEIR OWN?
THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN THE HIKARI ORGANIZATION AND MILITARY COMMAND RUNS DEEP. IT WOULDN'T DO FOR THE LOCAL TROOPS TO BOW THEIR HEADS.
SHK SHK

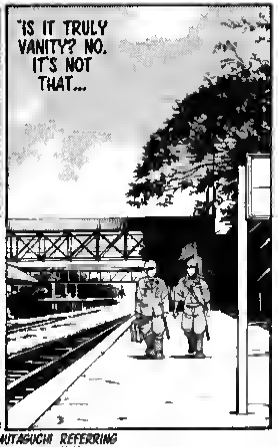
HIKARI ORGANIZATION: SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES ASSIGNED TO BURMA.
V FORCE AND KING SCOUTS: BOTH ARE SPECIAL FORCES TEAMS FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM.

...BUT IT'S BEEN OVER A MONTH SINCE WE HEARD FROM THE LAST TEAM.
HAVING A REGIMENT OF DESERTERS AROUND IN A FIELD OF OPERATION WOULD BE BAD FOR US...
TRUTH IS, THE HIKARI ORGANIZATION HAS SENT OUT SEVERAL AS WELL.
"WITH THE BATTLE OF IMPHAL UNDERWAY, NO ONE CAN REALLY SPARE THE MANPOWER. EVEN WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING MORE TO--"
BUT?
"GATHERING INFORMATION FROM THE BURMESE IS AS EASY AS PULLING A COMB THROUGH HAIR.
"NORMALLY, WE'D BE ABLE TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MEN WITH EASE. BUT..."
WITH ME, NEITHER SIDE WOULD BE TROUBLED IF I DIDN'T RETURN.
IT SEEMS THAT MUTUAL LOSSES HAVE GIVEN THEM SOMETHING IN COMMON.
SO THAT'S WHY I WAS CALLED IN.

NEITHER SIDE WOULD REJOICE IF YOU DIDN'T COME BACK, EITHER.
KATCHA
SLRRP
PLEASE COME BACK.
KATCHA
YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO TELL JUST BY LOOKING OUT YOUR WINDOW.
BY THE WAY HOW GOES THE BATTLE?
"THE MOMENT THAT CAN'T WALK IS WHEN THEY DIE.
"IN ORDER TO SURVIVE, THEY HAVE TO CONTINUE WALKING.
"THE SOLDIERS BEING DROPPED OFF IN THE VARIOUS REGIONS ALL WEAR EXPRESSIONLESS FACES AND LOOK LIKE STRANDED PILGRIMS.



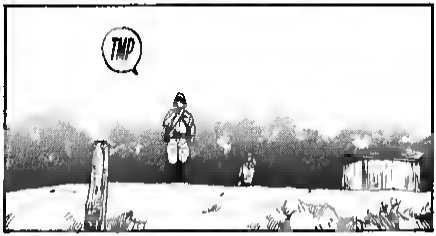


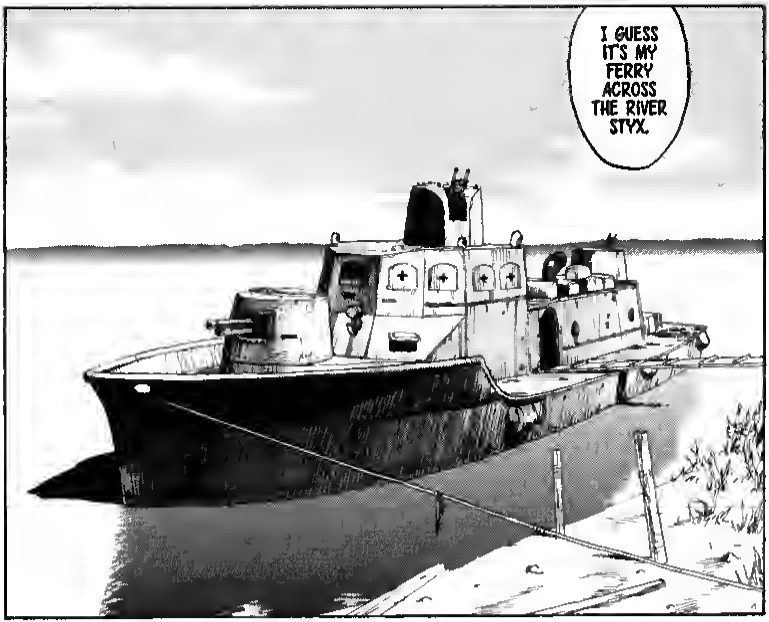


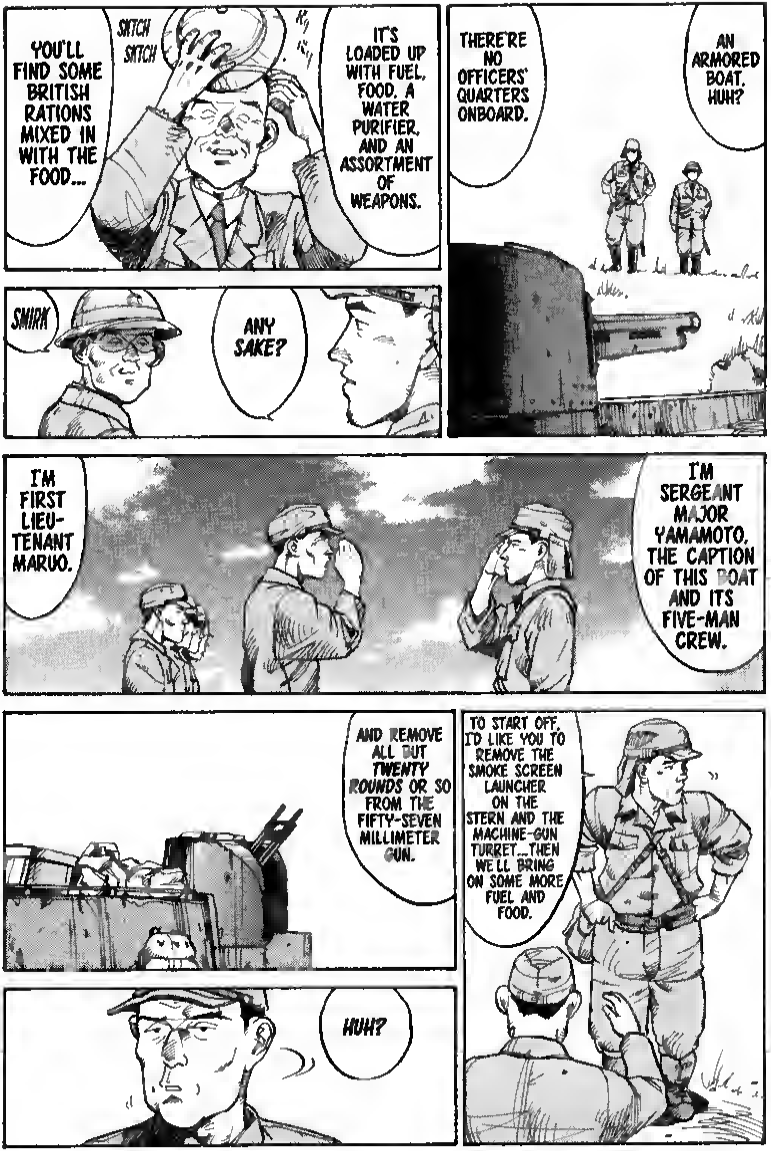
LITTLE TOJO NICKNAME FOR MAJOR GENERAL RENYA MUTAGUCHI REFERRING TO HIS ASSOCIATION WITH JAPANESE WAR MINISTER HIDEKI TOJO.

WELL, I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE OF *THOSE* IN A WHILE.

"WE SACRIFICE OTHERS TO FURTHER THAT ONE IDEAL."
"WE RUIN OURSELVES AND FOLLOW AN IDEAL."

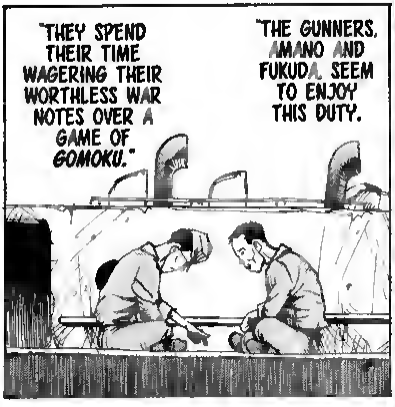

THUD

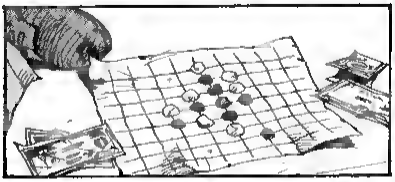

I GUESS IT'S MY FERRY ACROSS THE RIVER STYX.

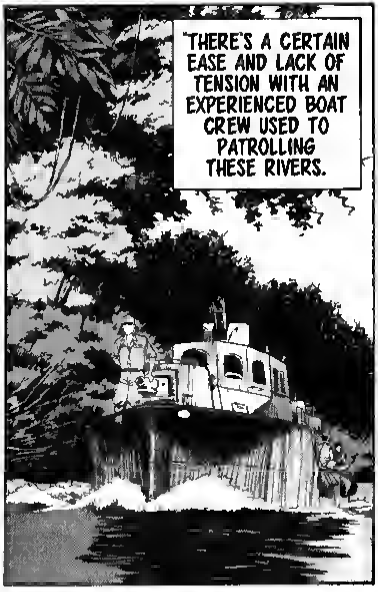

YOU'LL FIND SOME BRITISH RATIONS MIXED IN WITH THE FOOD...
SKITCH SKITCH
IT'S LOADED UP WITH FUEL, FOOD, A WATER PURIFIER, AND AN ASSORTMENT OF WEAPONS.
THERE'RE NO OFFICERS' QUARTERS ONBOARD.
AN ARMORED BOAT. HUH?
SNIRK
ANY SAKE?
I'M FIRST LIEU-TENANT MARUO.
I'M SERGEANT MAJOR YAMAMOTO, THE CAPTION OF THIS BOAT AND ITS FIVE-MAN CREW.
AND REMOVE ALL BUT TWENTY ROUNDS OR SO FROM THE FIFTY-SEVEN MILLIMETER GUN.
TO START OFF, I'D LIKE YOU TO REMOVE THE SMOKE SCREEN LAUNCHER ON THE STERN AND THE MACHINE-GUN TURRET...THEN WE'LL BRING ON SOME MORE FUEL AND FOOD.
HUH?

WHERE IS OUR DESTINATION?
WE LEAVE TOMORROW AT DAYBREAK. GET IT DONE BY THEN.
"SQUAD COMMANDER" IS FINE.
FIRST LIEUTENANT, SIR!
IT'S BECAUSE WE WON'T BE ABLE TO RE-SUPPLY FOR A WHILE.
IF WE REMOVE THE MACHINE-GUN TURRET, OUR COMBAT CAPABILITIES WILL BE--
I CAN'T TELL YOU...
...BUT WE'RE HEADING UPRIVER.

FWSHH
FWSHH
BRMM
BRMM
BRUMM
BRUMMM
BRMM
"ONCE AGAIN, ANOTHER MAN DISAPPEARS INTO THE DARKNESS... MEANINGLESSLY..."
"WILL HE RETURN TO THE JUNGLE?
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM


"THEY SPEND THEIR TIME WAGERING THEIR WORTHLESS WAR NOTES OVER A GAME OF GOMOKU."
"THE GUNNERS, AMANO AND FUKUDA, SEEM TO ENJOY THIS DUTY.




"THERE'S A CERTAIN EASE AND LACK OF TENSION WITH AN EXPERIENCED BOAT CREW USED TO PATROLLING THESE RIVERS.

"PERHAPS IT'S BECAUSE I REDUCED THE AMOUNT OF SHELLS, BUT HE CONTINUES TO HAVE A CONFRONTATIONAL TONE WITH ME.
"HASHIDA, IN CHARGE OF THE MAIN GUN, USED TO BE ON A TANK CREW.

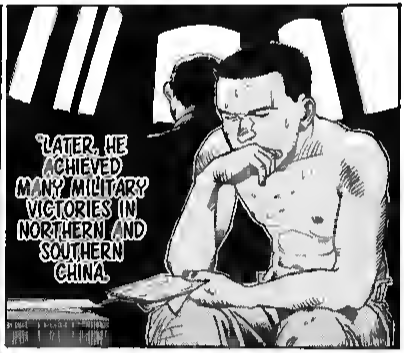
SQUAD COMMANDER, SIR!

OH.
SQUAD COMMANDER, I CAN'T SEE THROUGH YOU.

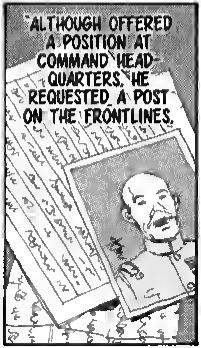
"SUZUKI, THE ENGINEER...
"...STAYS BELOW AND HARDLY SHOWS HIMSELF.
"THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP, YAMAMOTO, IS A VETERAN WHO'S TAKEN PART IN THE TAKING OF SHANGHAI, BUT...
"...WHETHER HE DISLIKES THE DUTY OR MYSELF, HE HARDLY SPEAKS TO ME.
"THE BOAT QUIETLY CONTINUES UPRIVER WITHOUT LEAVING A SIGH BEHIND. OUR DESTINATION IS THE UTOPIAN SOCIETY. I GUESS THAT MAKES US LIKE THE HUNTERS LOOKING FOR EL DORADO.
"ACTUALLY, IT'S BETTER THAT HE'S QUIET. USELESS BANTER ONLY GETS IN THE WAY ON A BATTLEFIELD.
COLONEL KURUTSU. HIS FAMILY IS FILLED WITH MILITARY MEN. HIS GRANDFATHER FOUGHT IN THE SATSUMA REBELLION. AND HIS FATHER FOUGHT IN THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR.
SHFF
Suntory

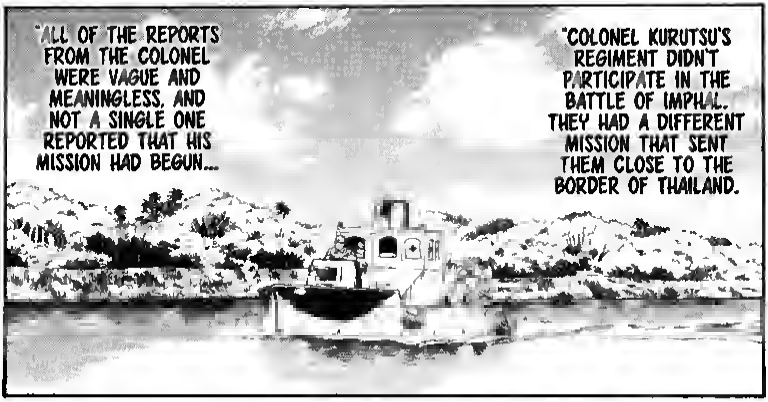
"AFTER THAT, HE WAS PROMOTED AND GIVEN A REGIMENT.
"DURING THE NOMONHAN INCIDENT, HIS COMPANY WAS DEVASTATED BY A SOVIET ARMORED BRIGADE AND MOSTLY WIPED OUT.

"THEN HE WAS SENT HERE...TO THE BATTLEFRONT IN BURMA.

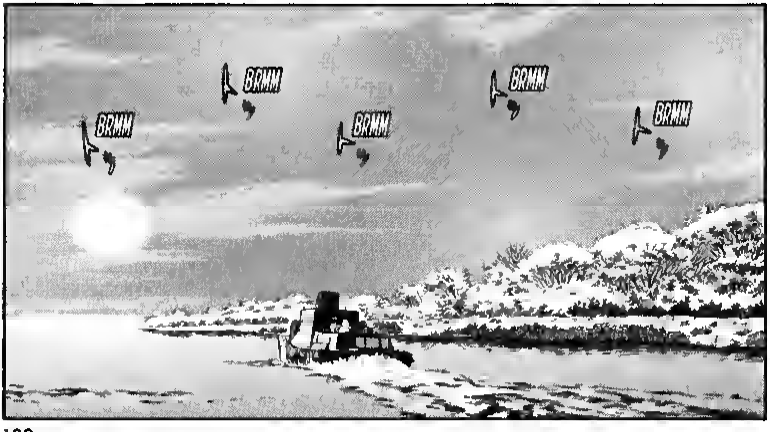

"LATER, HE ACHIEVED MANY MILITARY VICTORIES IN NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN CHINA.

FLAP
FLAP

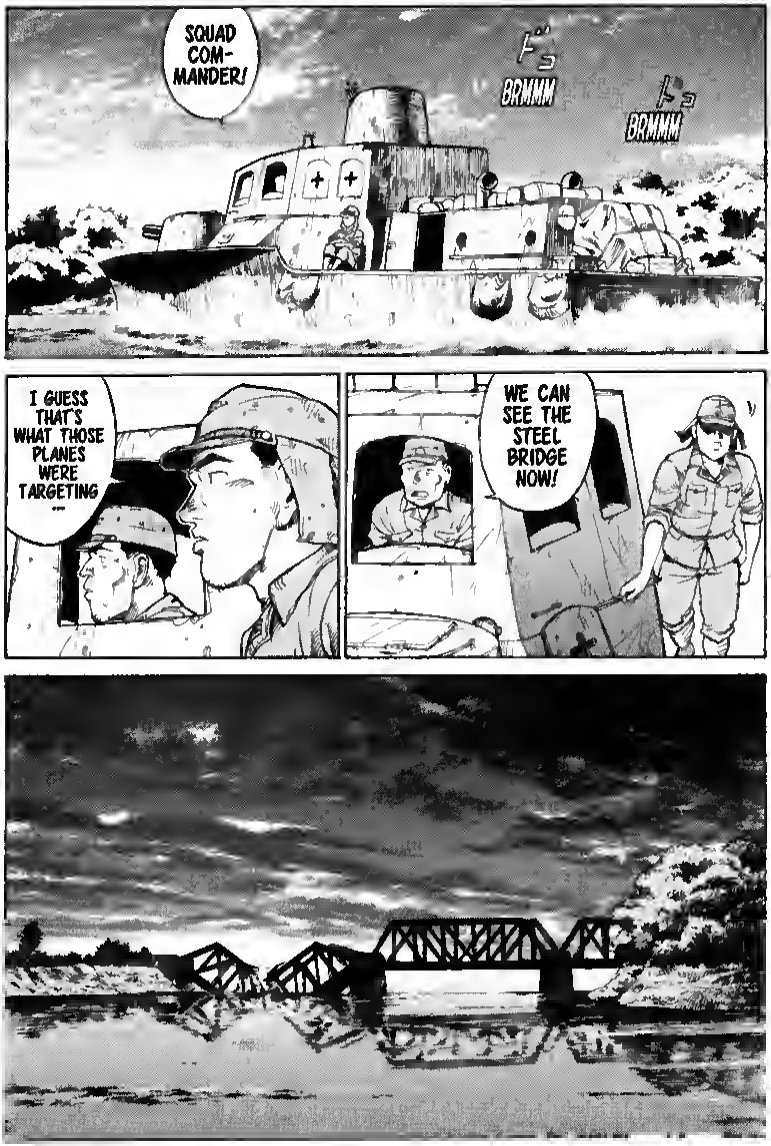

"ALTHOUGH OFFERED A POSITION AT COMMAND HEADQUARTERS, HE REQUESTED A POST ON THE FRONTLINES.


"ALL OF THE REPORTS FROM THE COLONEL WERE VAGUE AND MEANINGLESS, AND NOT A SINGLE ONE REPORTED THAT HIS MISSION HAD BEGUN...
"COLONEL KURUTSU'S REGIMENT DIDN'T PARTICIPATE IN THE BATTLE OF IMPHAL. THEY HAD A DIFFERENT MISSION THAT SENT THEM CLOSE TO THE BORDER OF THAILAND.

"AND THAT'S WHY I'VE BEEN CALLED IN."
OW!
"...WHICH LEADS ME TO BELIEVE THAT HE WAS ON A COVERT MISSION."

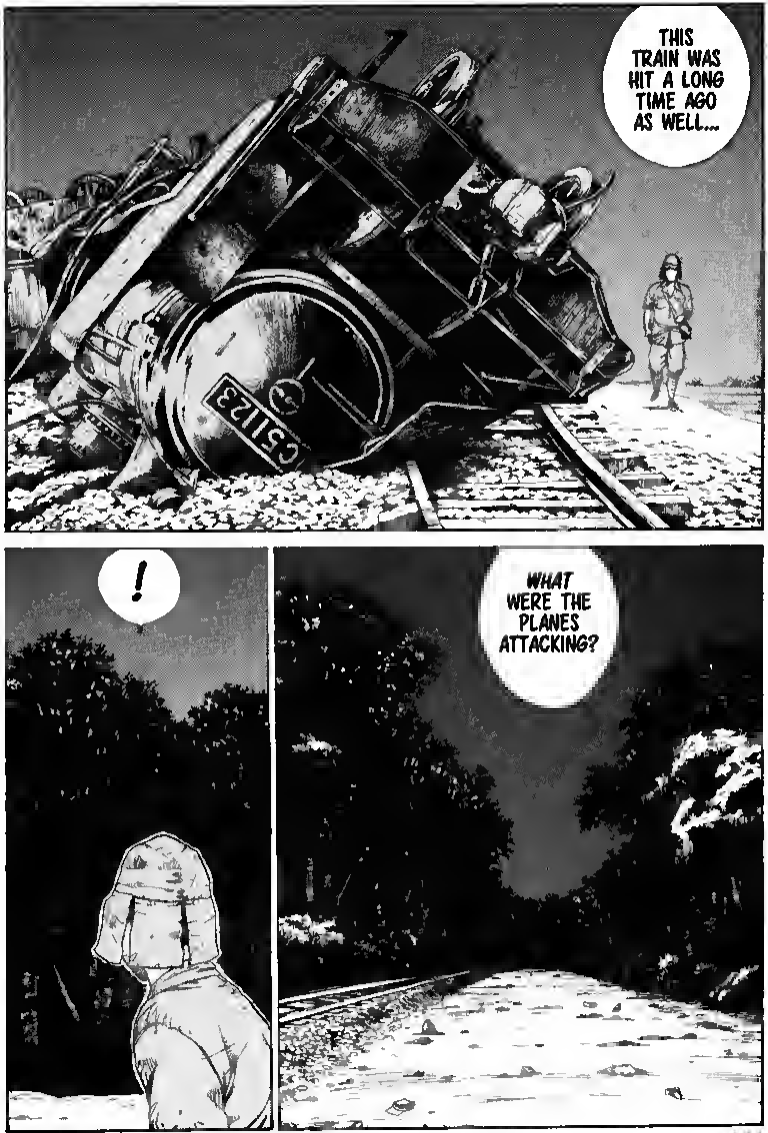

BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM

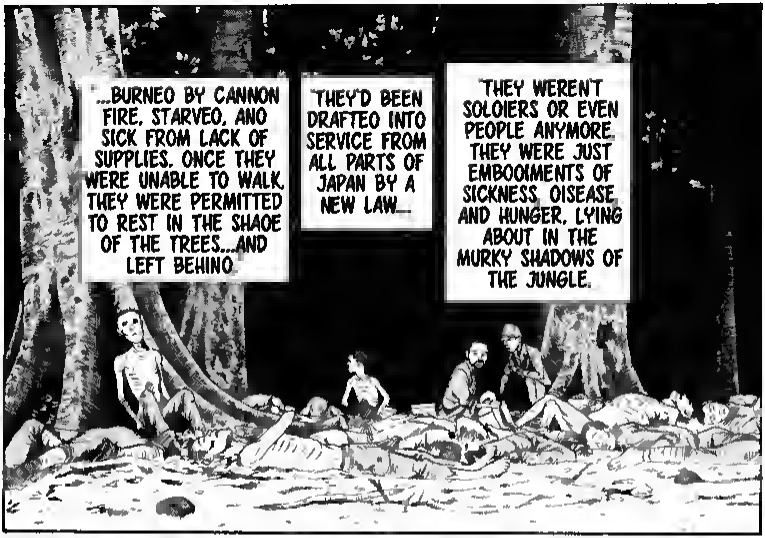
VRNN
VRNN
THE ENEMY PLANES ARE OUT IN FORCE TODAY.
VRNN
VRNN
VRNN
VRNN
SQUAD COM-MANDER.
WHAT ABOUT FUEL?
NO NEED FOR CONCERN.
WE'LL BE RE-SUPPLIED THERE.
WE'LL BE COMING TO A STEEL BRIDGE SOON.
I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH MORE WE CAN LAST. NOT A LOT OF OPTIONS FOR A BOAT LIKE THIS.


SQUAD COM-MANDER!
ドゥ
BRMMM
ドゥ
BRMMM
I GUESS THAT'S WHAT THOSE PLANES WERE TARGETING ...
WE CAN SEE THE STEEL BRIDGE NOW!

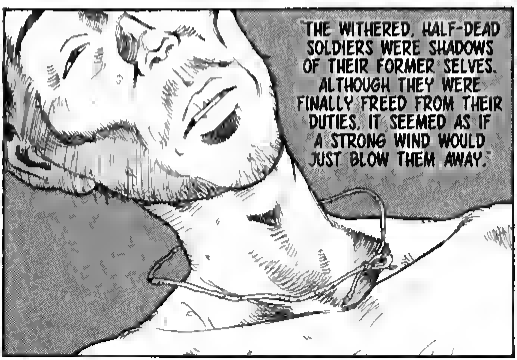
THERE SHOULD BE SOMEONE WAITING FOR US.
MOVE THE BOAT UNDER THE BRIDGE IN THE MEANTIME.
YOU'RE GOING OUT?

HMM. THIS BRIDGE WAS HIT A WHILE AGO.

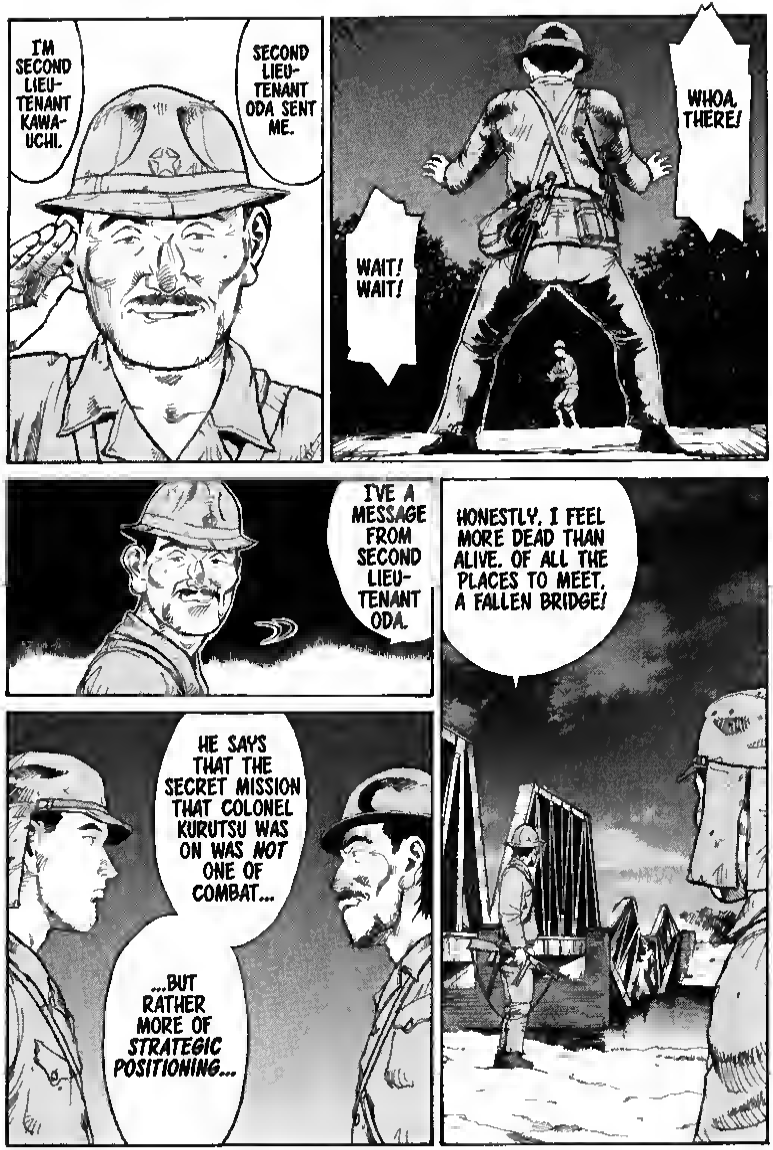

THIS TRAIN WAS HIT A LONG TIME AGO AS WELL...
C5123
!
WHAT WERE THE PLANES ATTACKING?


...BURNED BY CANNON FIRE, STARVED, AND SICK FROM LACK OF SUPPLIES. ONCE THEY WERE UNABLE TO WALK, THEY WERE PERMITTED TO REST IN THE SHADE OF THE TREES...AND LEFT BEHIND.
THEY'D BEEN DRAFTED INTO SERVICE FROM ALL PARTS OF JAPAN BY A NEW LAW...
THEY WEREN'T SOLDIERS OR EVEN PEOPLE ANYMORE. THEY WERE JUST EMBODIMENTS OF SICKNESS, DISEASE, AND HUNGER, LYING ABOUT IN THE MURKY SHADOWS OF THE JUNGLE.

...

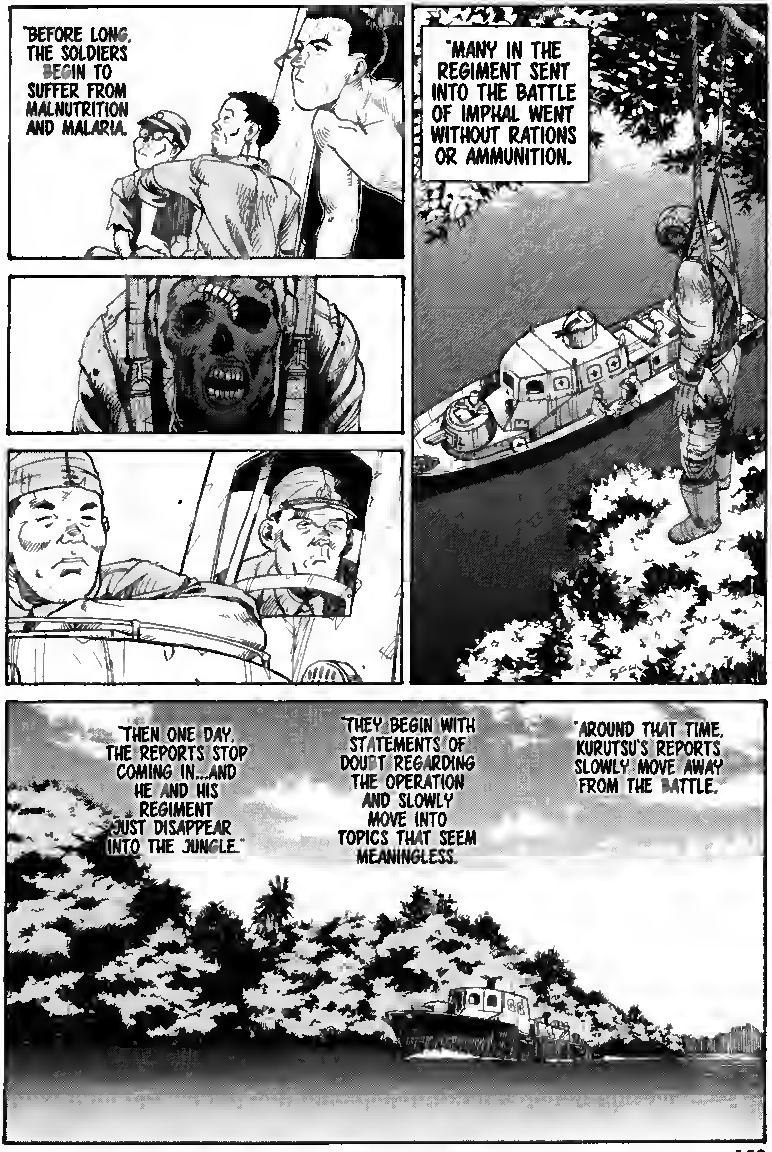

THE WITHERED, HALF-DEAD SOLDIERS WERE SHADOWS OF THEIR FORMER SELVES. ALTHOUGH THEY WERE FINALLY FREED FROM THEIR DUTIES, IT SEEMED AS IF A STRONG WIND WOULD JUST BLOW THEM AWAY.

I LEFT MY CANTEEN BEHIND.
SORRY.
...
...TER.
WHSHH
?!

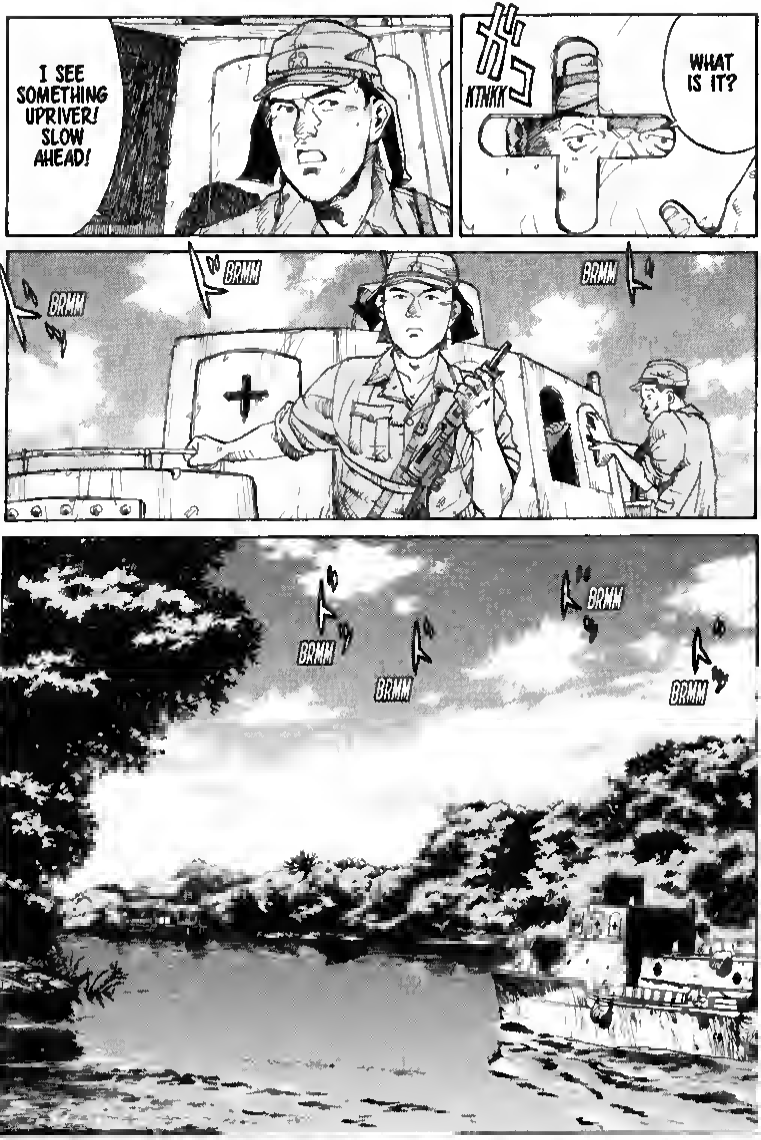

I'M SECOND LIEU-TENANT KAWA-UCHI.
SECOND LIEU-TENANT ODA SENT ME.
WHOA, THERE!
WAIT! WAIT!
I'VE A MESSAGE FROM SECOND LIEU-TENANT ODA.
HONESTLY, I FEEL MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE. OF ALL THE PLACES TO MEET, A FALLEN BRIDGE!
HE SAYS THAT THE SECRET MISSION THAT COLONEL KURUTSU WAS ON WAS *NOT* ONE OF COMBAT...
...BUT RATHER MORE OF *STRATEGIC POSITIONING*...

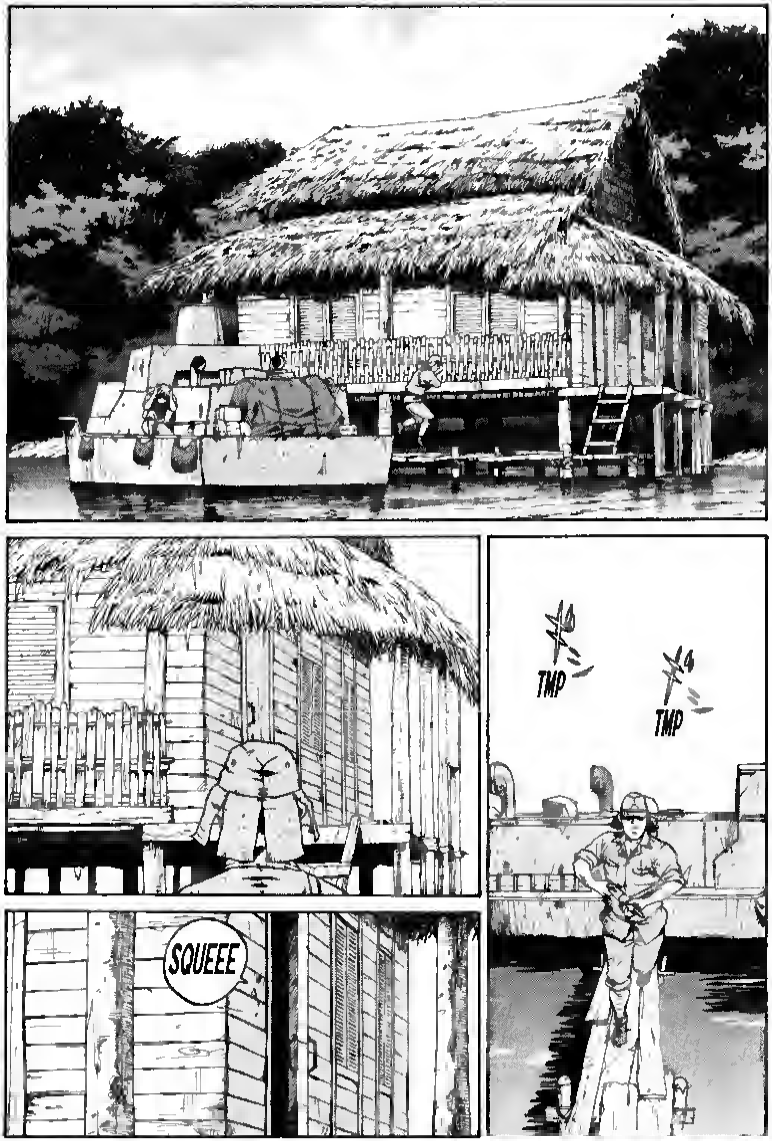
AND SECOND LIEUTENANT ODA WAITED TO SEND WORD UNTIL I GOT MUCH TOO FAR ALONG TO RETURN EASILY...
I SEE.
...AND ONE THAT WOULD NOT REQUIRE HIM TO ENGAGE IN COMBAT.
...
I'M JUST FOLLOWING THE ORDERS I'VE BEEN GIVEN.
I COULDN'T SAY.
FIRST LIEU-TENANT!
YOUR FUEL IS BURIED WHERE THAT MARKER'S STANDING. I'LL BE OFF, THEN.
SAME FOR YOU, TOO.
THANK YOU...AND BE CAREFUL.

BEYOND THIS POINT...
...YOU'LL BE IN HELL.
...
...
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM


"BEFORE LONG, THE SOLDIERS BEGIN TO SUFFER FROM MALNUTRITION AND MALARIA.
"MANY IN THE REGIMENT SENT INTO THE BATTLE OF IMPHAL WENT WITHOUT RATIONS OR AMMUNITION.
"THEN ONE DAY, THE REPORTS STOP COMING IN...AND HE AND HIS REGIMENT JUST DISAPPEAR INTO THE JUNGLE."
"THEY BEGIN WITH STATEMENTS OF DOUBT REGARDING THE OPERATION AND SLOWLY MOVE INTO TOPICS THAT SEEM MEANINGLESS.
"AROUND THAT TIME, KURUTSU'S REPORTS SLOWLY MOVE AWAY FROM THE BATTLE."

...
LET'S GET THE ARMOR PLATING ON!
TUNNK
CAPTAIN!


I SEE SOMETHING UPRIVER! SLOW AHEAD!
KTNKK
WHAT IS IT?
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM


TMP
TMP
SQUEEE

...
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU! I'M GLAD YOU'RE FINALLY HERE.
WELL, WELL!
PLEASE COME INSIDE.
COLONEL *KURUTSU*, RIGHT?
YOU'VE COME ALL THIS WAY! UNFORTUNATELY, I HAVEN'T HEARD FROM THE COLONEL IN NEARLY TWO MONTHS.
TMP
TMP
AND SO, THE "PACKAGE" ISN'T READY YET...?

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I DON'T ANSWER?
THAT'S ENOUGH. WHAT IS IT THAT YOU'RE DOING HERE?
?!
THE COLONEL AND I--
I NEED TO FIND COLONEL KURUTSU.
...
WHETHER YOU ANSWER OR NOT, I'M HEADING UPRIVER.
NOTHING.
CHKK
BY THE WAY, COLONEL KURUTSU HAS BEEN STRIPPED OF HIS COMMISSION.
WHICH ALSO MEANS YOUR JOB IS OVER.

IS THIS ENOUGH?
TINGG
FMPP
...
...
?!
SNATCH
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
WOULD YOU BELIEVE ME IF I TOLD YOU IT WAS FOR THE MONEY?

WE CALL IT THE "BRANCH OFFICE."
AND THIS PLACE?
I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED.
ARE YOU A CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE?
NO.
HOWEVER, TREATING ME LIKE AN OFFICER MIGHT HAVE FOOLED ME.
YOU CAME HERE LOOKING FOR THE COLONEL WITHOUT KNOWING?
AND WHAT "PACKAGE" WERE YOU WAITING FOR?
THE "PACKAGE"...? OPIUM.
...
YOU AND I ARE IN A SIMILAR SITUATION.
YES.

TYPICAL. THAT'S A GREAT WAY TO KEEP ONE'S HANDS FROM GETTING DIRTY.
SO. IT WAS BEING SOLD THROUGH CIVILIAN CHANNELS.
I SEE.
AND THERE ARE NO ORDERS OR ANYTHING TO PROVE THIS, CORRECT?
OF COURSE NOT! I'M REALLY NOT EVEN A CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE.
CLIK
FFSH
IT TOOK A WHILE TO TEACH HER...
OH THIS?
CHK
ALTHOUGH, YOU SEEM RATHER WELL DRESSED.

THE JAPANESE FORCES ARE SO GENEROUS.
WHEN I SAW A BOAT COMING, I THOUGHT IT WAS HERE TO PICK ME UP.
SO... YOU'RE HEADED UPRIVER?
TMP
TMP
YES.
YOU ARE CORRECT.
HEH.
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM
BRMM

"WE MOVE ALONG THE UNENDING, EMPTY WATERWAYS, THE MANY CURVES AND BENDS IN THE RIVER. THE SOUND OF THE MOTOR ECHOING OFF THE SHEER ROCK WALLS ALONG THE BANKS...
"SO AGAIN, THE SMALL, FLAT-BOTTOM BOAT TRAVELS DEEP INTO THE SILENCE.
"...AND AT THE FEET OF THESE GIANTS, A SMALL, FLAT-BOTTOM BOAT CRAWLS ALONG..."
"THE LARGE TREES MOVE TOGETHER AND SWAY UNDER THE GREAT SKY...
"ALL WE SEE ARE TREES. TREES, AND MORE TREES.

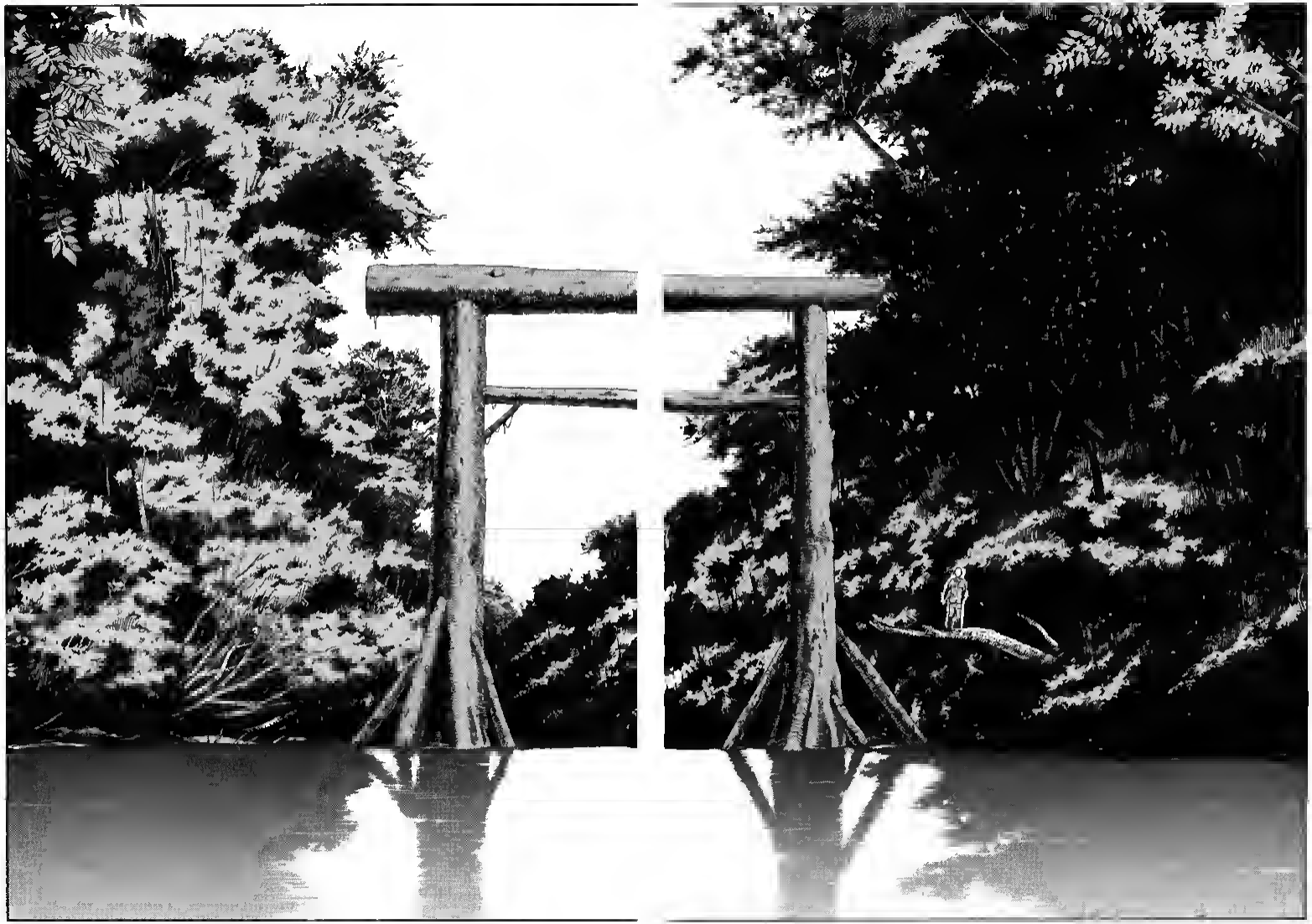
ドBRMM
ドBRMM
ドBRMM
ドBRMM
ドBRMM
ドBRMM
ドBRMM
FMPP
?!
TNKK
...?!

TNKK
ENEMY ATTACK !!
KTNKK
KTNKK
VRRUMMBB
JUST WOODEN STICKS ?!
WHAT ARE THEY?
RETURN FIRE!!
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
SQUAD COM-MANDER! PLEASE MOVE OUT OF THE WAY!
THIS ISN'T AN ATTACK!
STOP! CEASE FIRE!

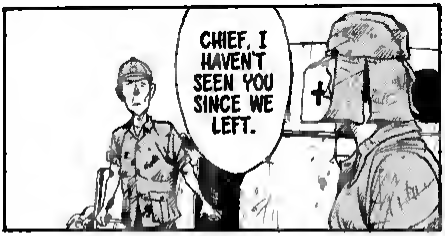
KTCHH
CAPTAIN !
FWPP
FWPP
JUST DO IT!
BUT... I'M...
TAKE THE HELM!

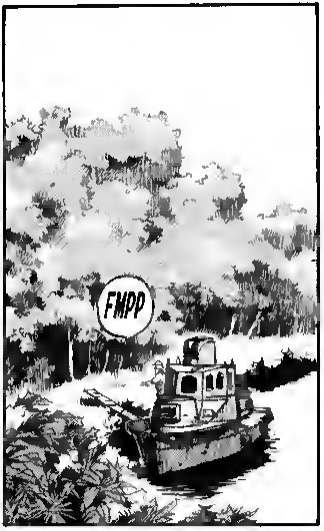
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR ORDERS ARE, BUT THERE ISN'T ANYTHING UP HERE!
SQUAD COMMANDER, SIR! LET'S GO BACK! WHY'D WE EVEN COME UP HERE?!
SHIT
SHIT
"...AND COLONEL KURUTSU MAY BE ALREADY DEAD.
"NOTHING UP HERE...
"WHY AM I HERE?
"WHY DID THE COLONEL DESERT?
"NO! I WON'T BELIEVE THAT! HE HAS TO BE ALIVE!
"UNTIL I FIND OUT THE ANSWER, I NEED HIM TO BE ALIVE!
"WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE...AT THE END OF THE EARTH?

"HE HAS TO BE!"
SPISHH
IT STOPPED ---



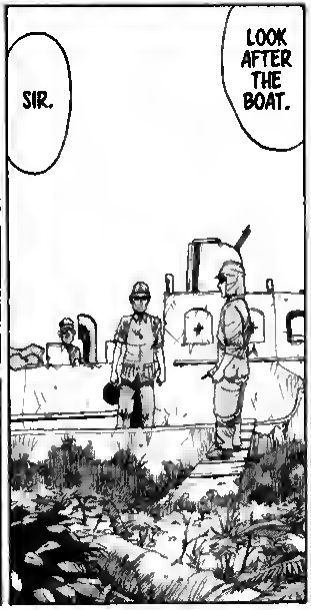
AND YOU AS WELL?
JAPAN-ESE?
HE'S UP ABOVE.
AM I ON TIME?
YEAH.


CHIEF, I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE WE LEFT.


FMPP

...
PLEASE CLEAN THE PILOT-HOUSE.

IS IT SAFE? THERE ARE NATIVES LIVING IN THIS JUNGLE, RIGHT?

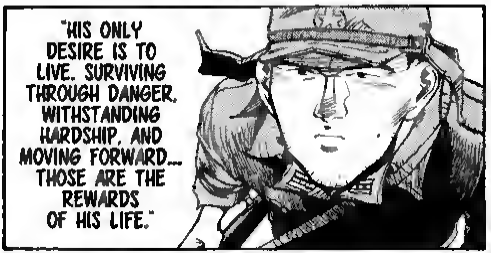

SIR.
LOOK AFTER THE BOAT.

IT SHOULD BE FINE. THEY DON'T MEAN TO HARM US...

DO YOU TALK TO COLONEL KURUTSU OFTEN?
...ALTHOUGH THERE IS AN OCCASIONAL ACCIDENT OR TWO.
THAT SIGNAL FLARE WAS QUITE EFFECTIVE.
BUT THAT, TOO, WILL SOON...
TALK?! WE JUST LISTEN MOST OF THE TIME!
OH! JAPANESE CIGARETTES ?
HOW ABOUT ONE OF THESE ?

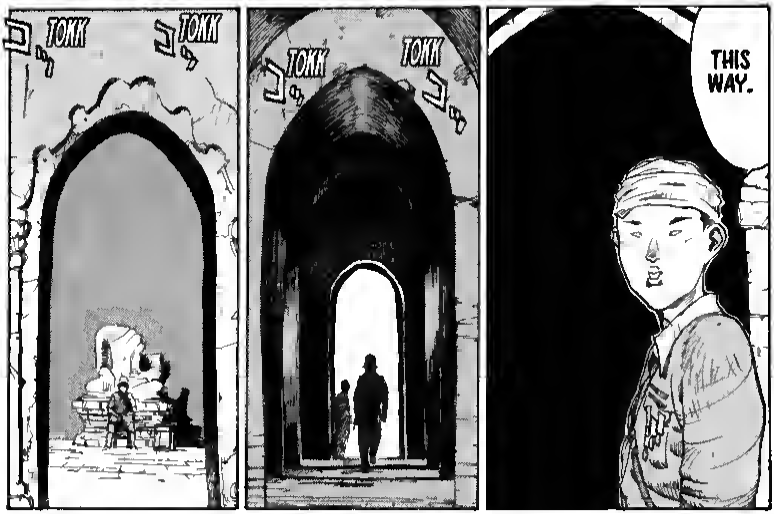
ONE NEEDS TO EXPERIENCE WAR WHILE STILL YOUNG. I MET THE COLONEL FOR THE FIRST TIME ON A BATTLE-FIELD.
I CAN HONESTLY SAY THAT THE COLONEL HAS BROADENED MY HEART AND SOUL.

PFFAAA!
THIS'S THE ONE THING I MISS NOT HAVING HERE.


"HIS ONLY DESIRE IS TO LIVE. SURVIVING THROUGH DANGER, WITHSTANDING HARDSHIP, AND MOVING FORWARD... THOSE ARE THE REWARDS OF HIS LIFE."

"SO YOUNG...IS IT YOUTH AND INDIFFERENCE THAT MAKE HIM ABLE TO WITHSTAND ALL THIS DESTRUCTION AND DEATH?

!


TOKK
TOKK
TOKK
TOKK
THIS WAY.

...WERE YOU SENT TO ASSASSINATE ME?
HONESTLY ...
WELCOME.
I'M FIRST LIEU-TENANT MARUO.
FWSH

...I SHOULD TELL YOU ABOUT MINE.
BUT AS YOU'VE TOLD ME OF *YOUR* MISSION...
THAT'S THE SAME THING.
NO. JUST TO RELIEVE YOU OF YOUR COMMAND.
AN IGNORANT DREAM, REALLY.
"...AS WE HAD DONE WITH THE CHINESE. THE PLAN WAS TO MAKE THE BURMESE DO THE SAME THING."
"MY ORIGINAL MISSION WAS TO HARVEST OPIUM IN THIS LAND...

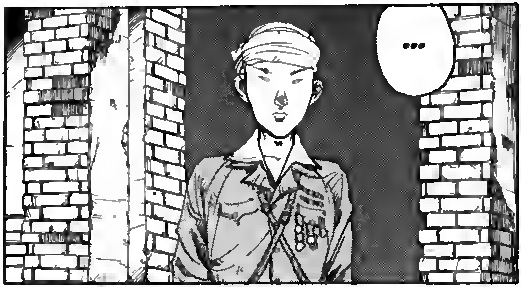
...ALTHOUGH THERE WERE TIMES THAT I WISHED I WAS MAD.
I HAVE NEVER LOST CONTROL OF MYSELF IN BATTLE...
SO YOU AREN'T A DESERTER?
DESERTER? DO YOU THINK THAT I'VE LOST MY MIND?
"EVEN IF I HAD DESERTED, WHY WOULD COMMAND HEADQUARTERS ON BOTH SIDES BOTHER SENDING MEN INTO THE JUNGLE AFTER ME?
"LEFT ALONE, WE'D EVENTUALLY PERISH...
"...BUT BOTH SIDES AND THEIR SPECIAL FORCES WERE AFTER THE OPIUM I HARVESTED.
"I COMMANDED THE NATIVES TO GROW CROPS THEY COULDN'T EAT.
"WE SUCCEEDED ONCE. BUT RECENTLY THEY'VE BEGUN TO GROW RESTLESS.
"REALIZING THAT THEY'VE BEEN FOOLED, THEIR MOOD HAS GROWN VERY DARK."

I THINK THEY SENSE THAT THIS PLACE MAY BE SOON OVERRUN AND TAKEN OVER BY THE ENEMY.
NOW THAT THE TIDE SEEMS TO HAVE TURNED HERE IN BURMA, THE HIGH COMMAND HAS GIVEN UP ON THE HARVESTING... AND NOW THEY HOPE TO CLEAN UP THE MESS.
COUGH
COUGH
THEY'RE AFRAID THAT THE BRITISH FORCES WILL CAPTURE ME AND DISCOVER THE OPIUM PLANTATION.
THE ONLY KIND OF THING THAT THE FOOLS LOUNGING AROUND IN RANGOON COULD COME UP WITH...
...IS TO TRY AND HIDE THEIR OWN INCOMPETENCE BY CHANGING THE RECORDS AND COVERING THEIR TRACKS.
THEY DON'T EVEN THINK TWICE ABOUT SACRIFICING MEN.
"AND THAT TORII?"
THAT..."

I HAVE TO TAKE THE COLONEL BACK TO HEADQUARTERS.
...THAT'S A SYMBOL OF OUR RESOLVE...
PLEASE... RESIGN YOUR COMMAND AND GO HOME TO REST.
THE COLONEL HAS DONE MUCH FOR OUR NATION.
OF MEN WHO'VE BEEN USED AND NEGLECTED BY THEIR HOMELAND.
ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT MY LIFE?
HEH HEH HEH!
YOU SHOULD UNDER-STAND AS WELL AS I DO!
IF YOU'VE BEEN SENT HERE, I'M SURE YOU'VE SEEN SOME COMBAT IN YOUR CAREER.
DON'T BE SO IMPUDENT! I'M THE ONE WHO'S WILLING TO SPARE YOUR LIFE!

YES! I AM FINE! AND I WILL SEE MY IDEALS THROUGH TO THE END!
MY MISSION IS NOT YET OVER.
WHY TRY AND TAKE MY COMMAND AWAY FROM ME NOW? WHAT DID THEY EVEN SEND SOLDIERS ALL OVER THE WORLD FOR? WAS IT NOT FOR THE GOOD OF THE NATION... FOR ITS HONOR AND PERMANENCY ?
I WILL NOT RETURN WITH YOU!
NOW LEAVE!

I'LL BE BACK AGAIN TOMORROW.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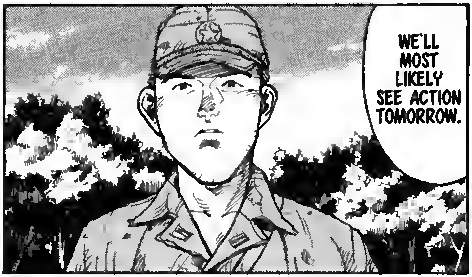
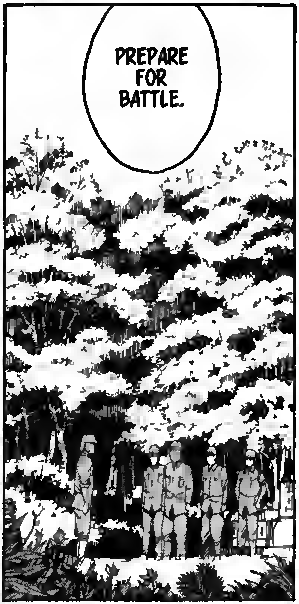
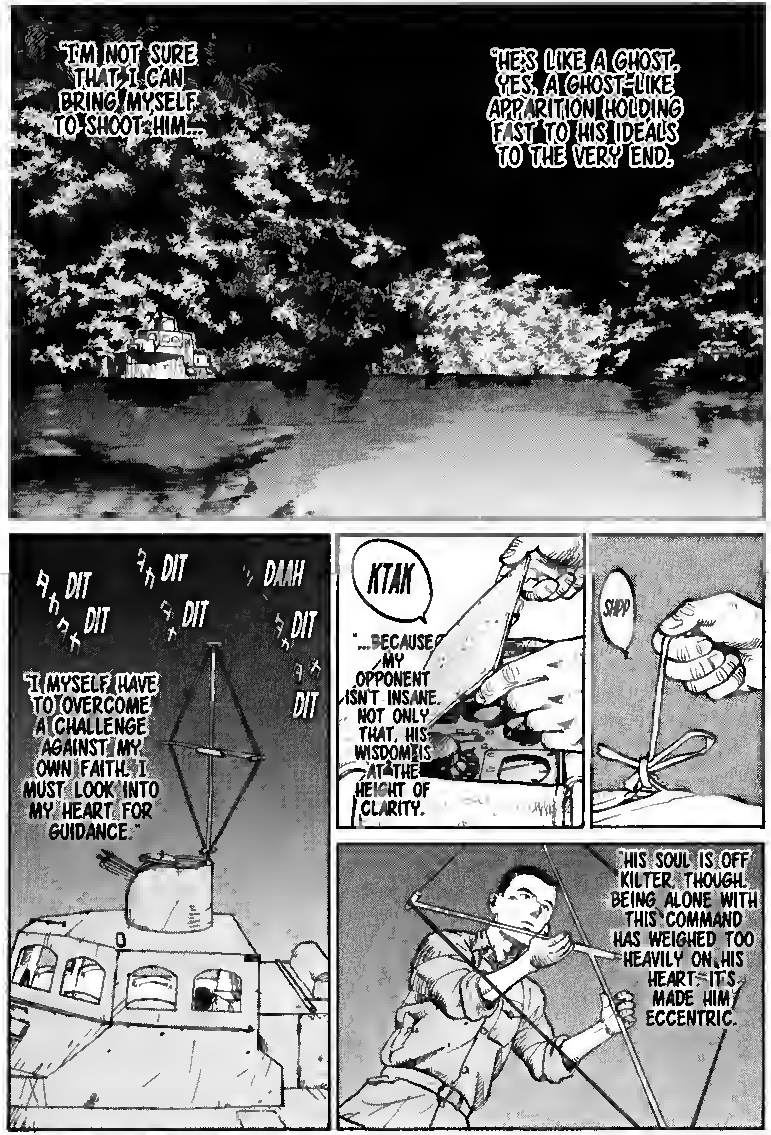
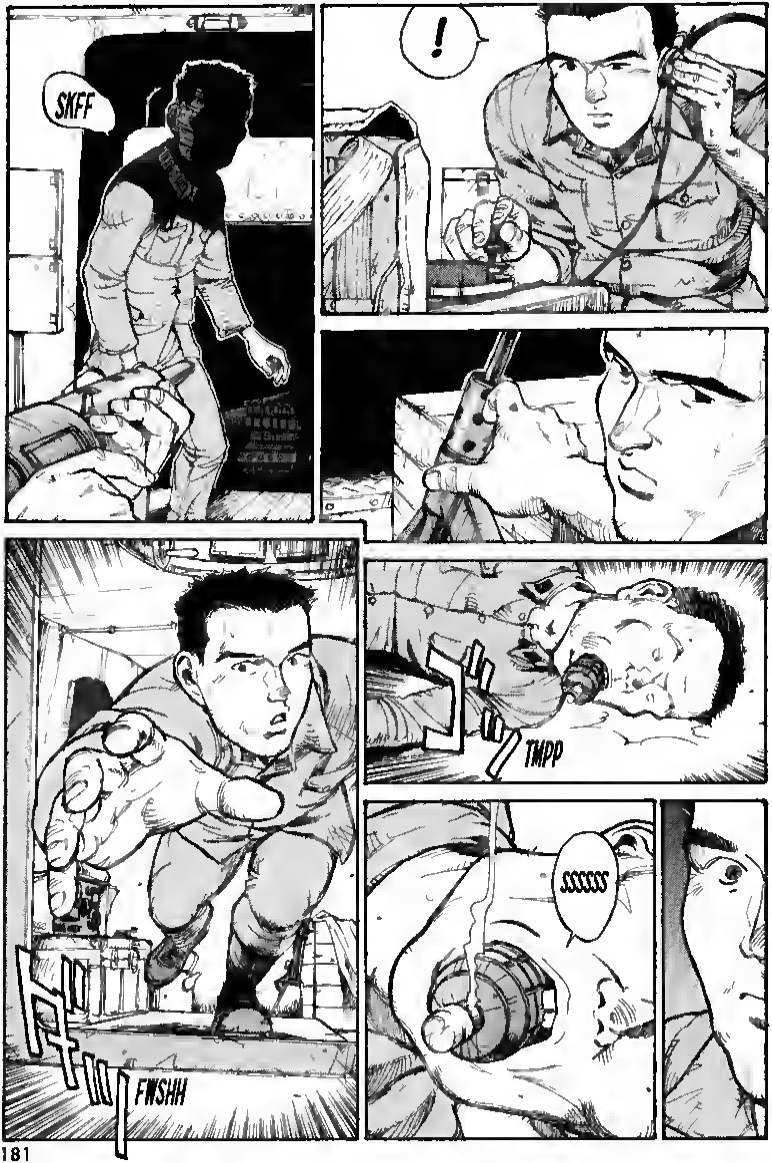

WE'LL MOST LIKELY SEE ACTION TOMORROW.


PREPARE FOR BATTLE.

...AGAINST FELLOW JAPANESE SOLDIERS ?
ARE WE GOING TO FIGHT...

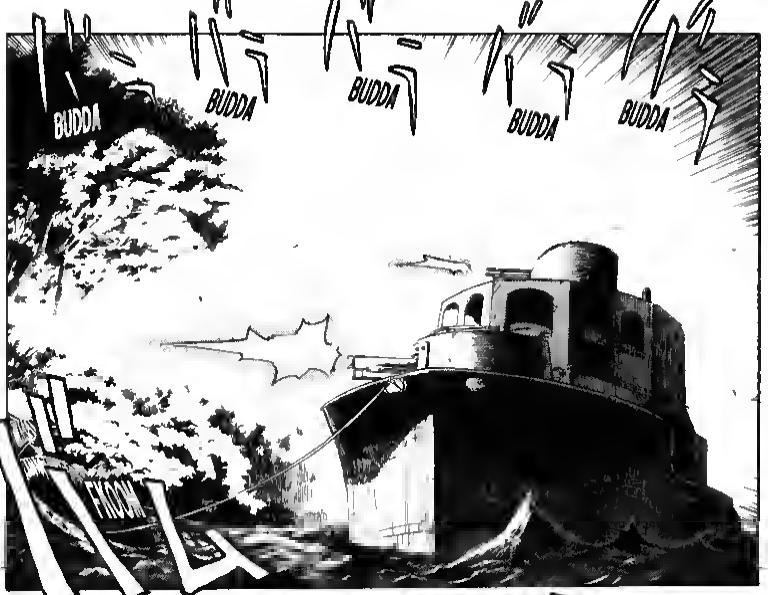

"I'M NOT SURE THAT I CAN BRING MYSELF TO SHOOT HIM...
"HE'S LIKE A GHOST. YES, A GHOST-LIKE APPARITION HOLDING FAST TO HIS IDEALS TO THE VERY END.
DIT DIT DIT DIT DIT DIT DAAH DIT
"I MYSELF HAVE TO OVERCOME A CHALLENGE AGAINST MY OWN FAITH. I MUST LOOK INTO MY HEART FOR GUIDANCE."
KTAK
"...BECAUSE MY OPPONENT ISN'T INSANE. NOT ONLY THAT, HIS WISDOM IS AT THE HEIGHT OF CLARITY.
SHPP
HIS SOUL IS OFF KILTER, THOUGH. BEING ALONE WITH THIS COMMAND HAS WEIGHED TOO HEAVILY ON HIS HEART. IT'S MADE HIM ECCENTRIC.

NOTE: LIEUTENANT MARUO IS SENDING A MESSAGE USING MORSE CODE.


SKFF
!
TMPP
FWSHH
SSSSSS

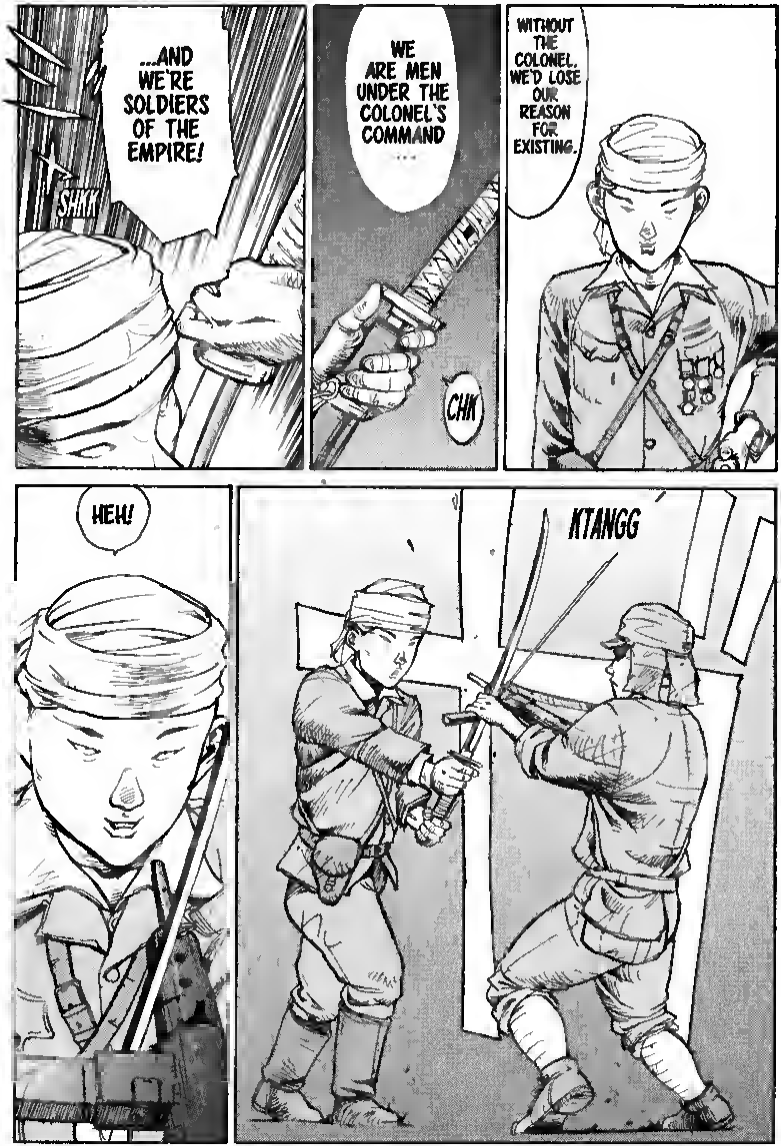
HFF!
HFF!
BWOOM
?!
?!
SHFF
SHFF
SHFF
SHFF
'KTANGG
'KTANGG
BKAM
BKAM
BKAM
BKAM
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!

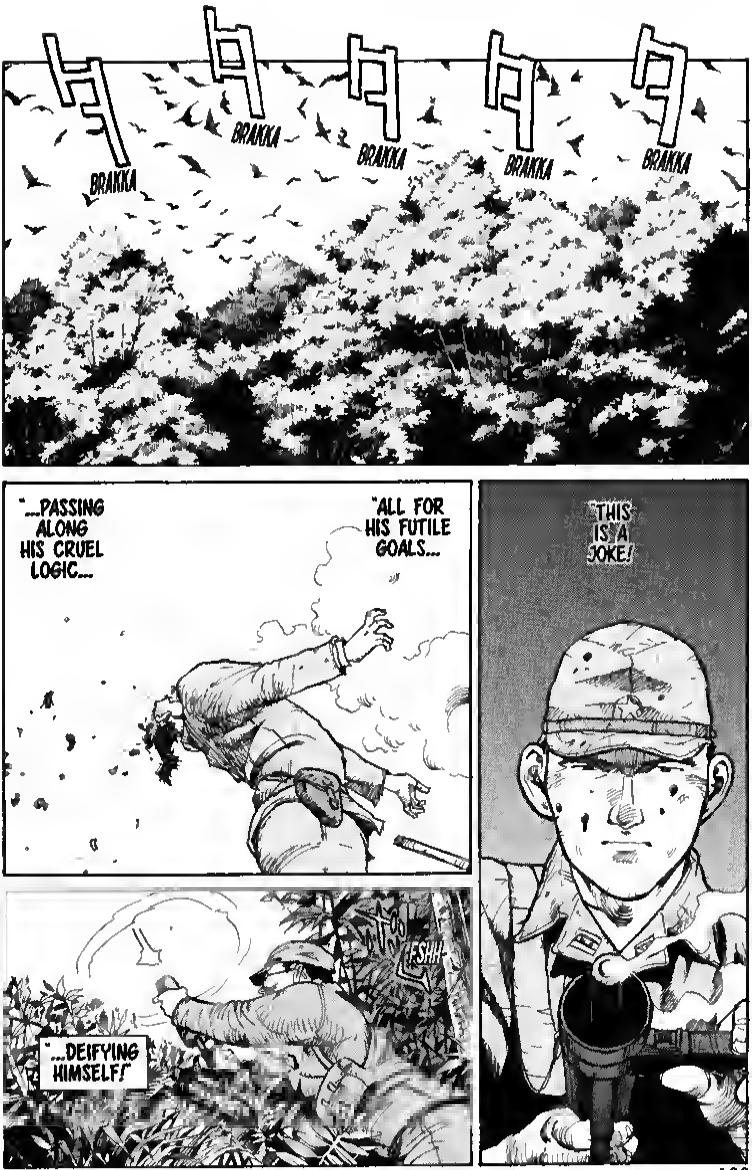
SPAKK
KANGG
KANGG
!
HASHIDA! MACHINE GUNS IN THE JUNGLE TO THE RIGHT! PREPARE TO FIRE THE MAIN GUNS!
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
DON'T DAWDLE!
RETURN FIRE!
FIRE MULTIPLE ROUNDS!
KTTNGG
KANGG
KANGG
TARGET BEARING THREE O'CLOCK! DISTANCE FIFTY!
KTANGG
POKK
BKAM

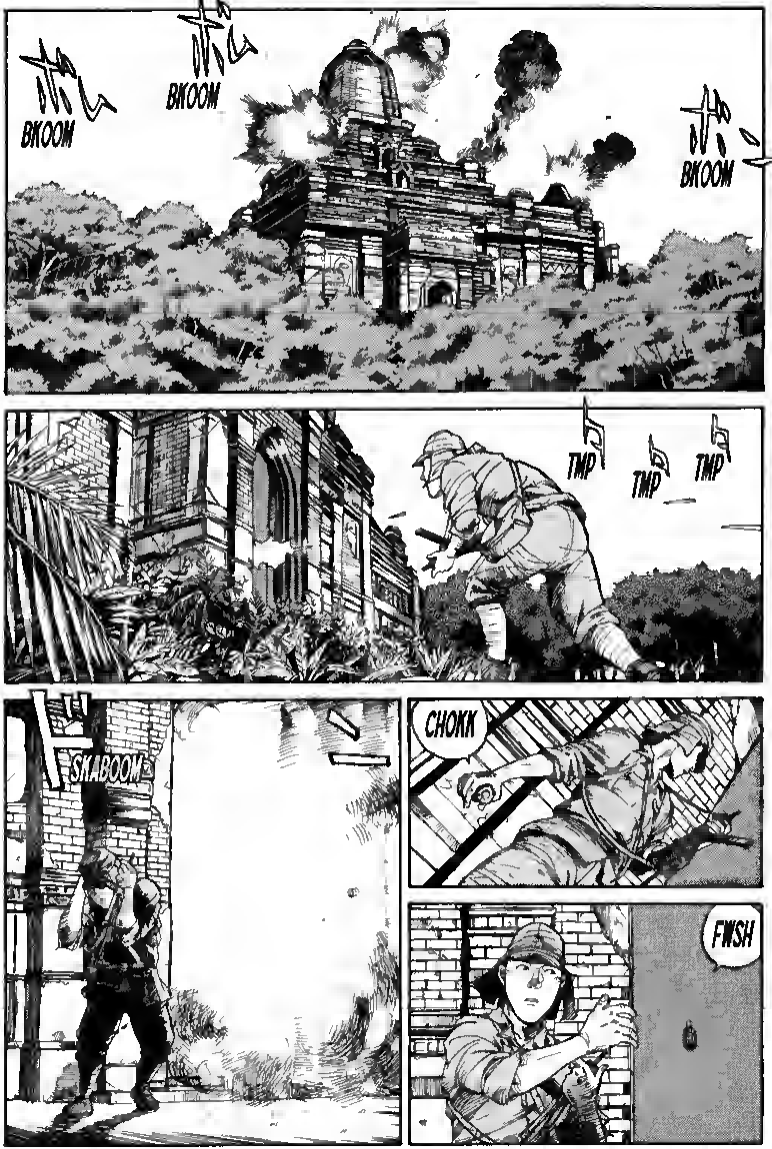

BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
TMPP
THOOOM
SKSHH
SKSHH
SQUEE

RATTA
RATTA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
SHFF
SHFF
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
IBA
BRAKKA
?
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA

...
SNFF
SO, YOU'VE RETURNED.
I WON'T LET YOU TAKE THE COLONEL.
MY MISSION IS ONLY TO TAKE THE COLONEL INTO CUSTODY. YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU WANT.
...WHAT WILL BECOME OF US?
IF THE COLONEL IS FORCED TO GO WITH YOU...
I COMMEND YOU ON YOUR LOYALTY. BUT THE COLONEL IS NO LONGER YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER.


...AND WE'RE SOLDIERS OF THE EMPIRE!
SHIK!
WE ARE MEN UNDER THE COLONEL'S COMMAND
CHK
WITHOUT THE COLONEL, WE'D LOSE OUR REASON FOR EXISTING.
HEH!
KTANGG

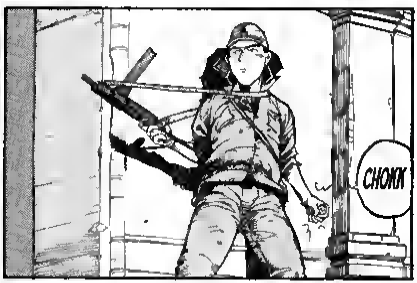

BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
"...PASSING ALONG HIS CRUEL LOGIC...
"ALL FOR HIS FUTILE GOALS...
"THIS IS A JOKE!
FSHH
"...DEIFYING HIMSELF!"

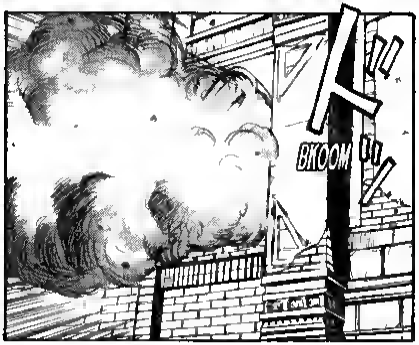

BKOOM
BKOOM
BKOOM
TMP
TMP
TMP
SKABOOM
CHOKK
FWSH

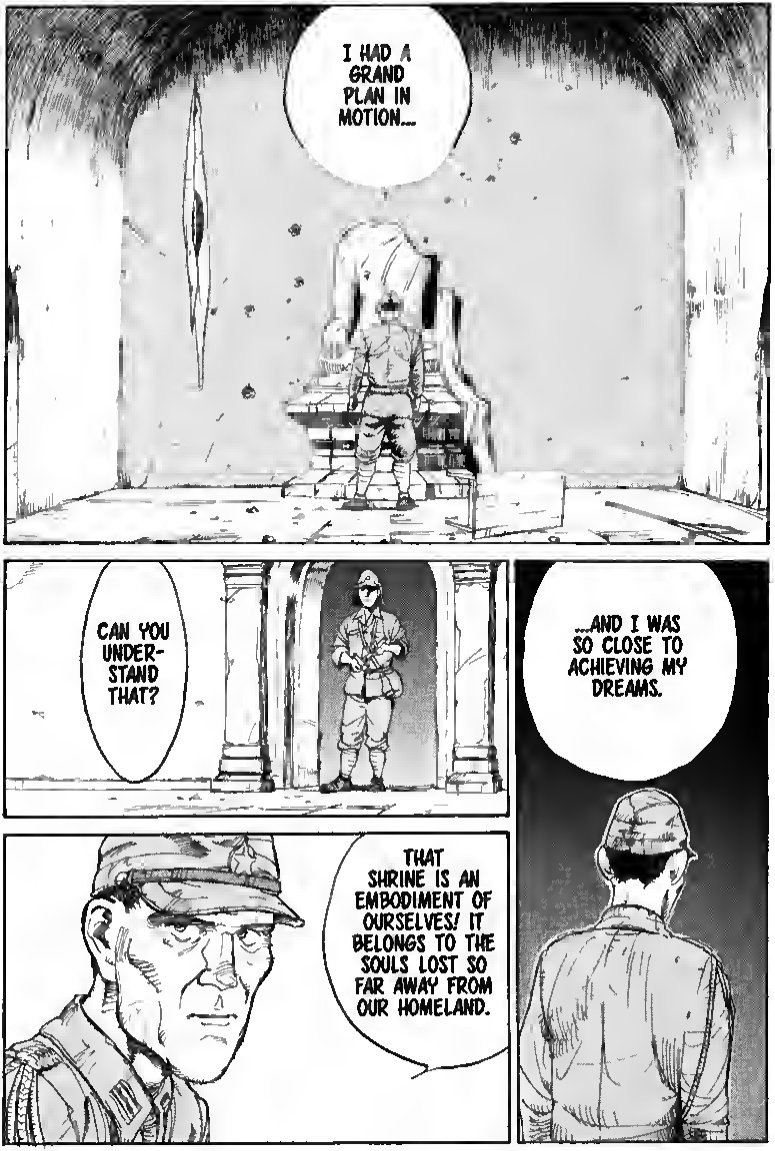
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
SPRAKK
POKK

BRAKKA
BRAKKA

KTINKK
TINKK

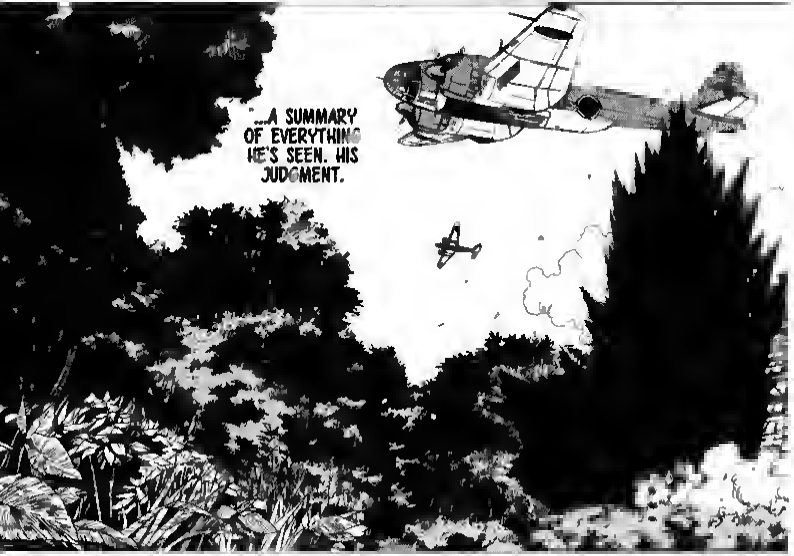

CHOKK

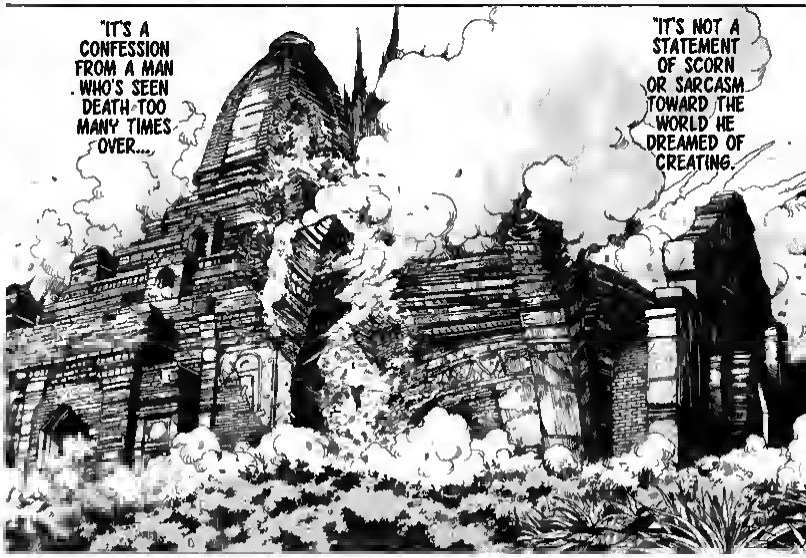

BKOOM

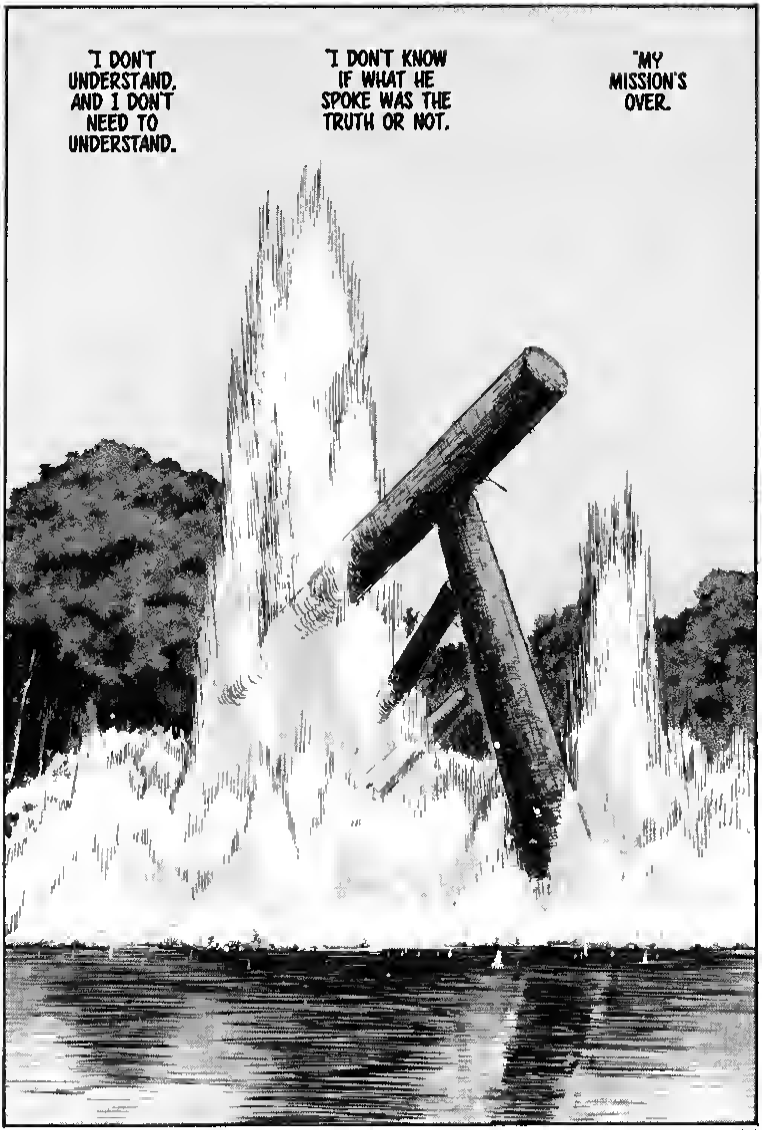

I HAD A GRAND PLAN IN MOTION....
CAN YOU UNDER-STAND THAT?
...AND I WAS SO CLOSE TO ACHIEVING MY DREAMS.
THAT SHRINE IS AN EMBODIMENT OF OURSELVES! IT BELONGS TO THE SOULS LOST SO FAR AWAY FROM OUR HOMELAND.

THIS PLACE IS HELL ITSELF!

YES! IT'S HELL!
I WAS SO CLOSE!
KACHIKK


...A SUMMARY OF EVERYTHING HE'S SEEN. HIS JUDGMENT.


"IT'S A CONFESSION FROM A MAN WHO'S SEEN DEATH TOO MANY TIMES OVER...
"IT'S NOT A STATEMENT OF SCORN OR SARCASM TOWARD THE WORLD HE DREAMED OF CREATING.

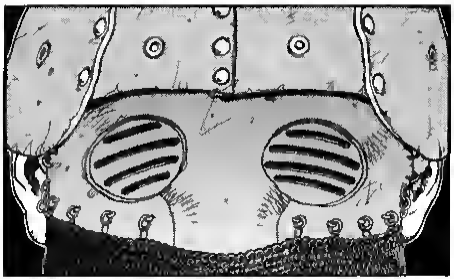

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND. AND I DON'T NEED TO UNDERSTAND.
"I DON'T KNOW IF WHAT HE SPOKE WAS THE TRUTH OR NOT.
"MY MISSION'S OVER.

"THE COLONEL. THE TRUTH. THE PAST. AND FUTURE ARE STILL LEFT BEHIND IN THAT DARKNESS.
"SINCE I CHOSE NOT TO FIND THE ANSWER IN DEATH...
"...I DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW.
"...IS THAT HE MET HIS END IN THE DEEP JUNGLE...FAR. FAR FROM HIS HOME.
"THE ONLY THING I KNOW FOR CERTAIN...
"THE RIVER SEEMS TO RUN ON FOREVER...

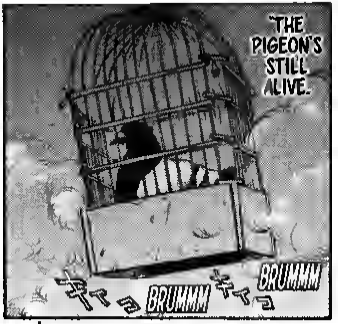
"...AS IF IT LEADS INTO THE HEART OF DARKNESS ITSELF."

INSPIRED BY:
HEART OF DARKNESS
by Joseph Conrad

REFERENCE:
NAKANO SCHOOL
(*Nakano Gakko*)
by Seiga Maruyama



KACLANK
KACLANK
THERE'S A DITCH UP AHEAD!
WE'RE GOING TO FALL IN!


"THE PIGEON'S STILL ALIVE.
BRUMMM
BRUMMM

HFF
HFF
"NO POISON GAS YET."

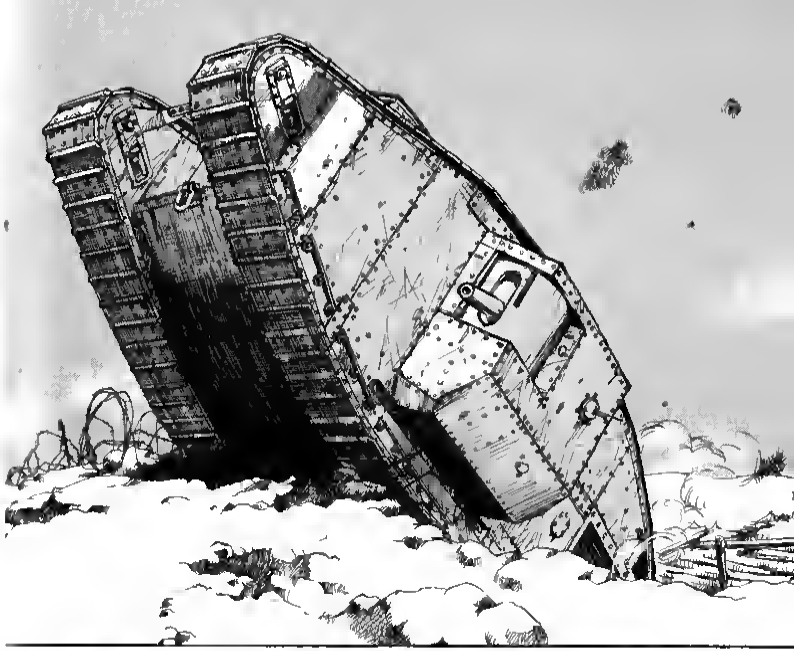
SKEEE
SKEEE
SKEEE
CHOMPP
....COME ON!
CHOK
CHOK
CHOK
JUST CLIMB OUT!!

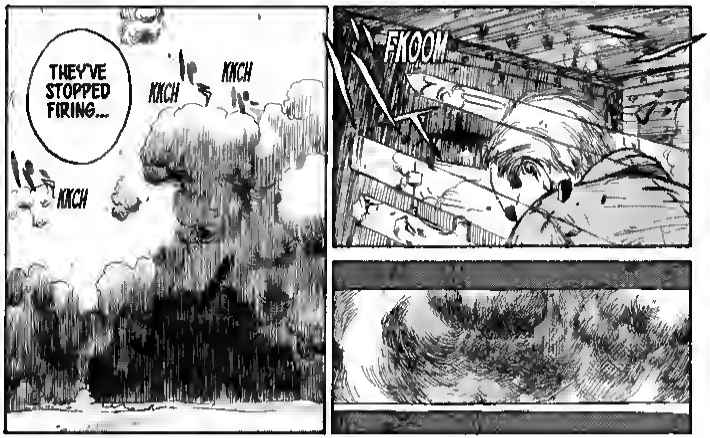
BKOOM

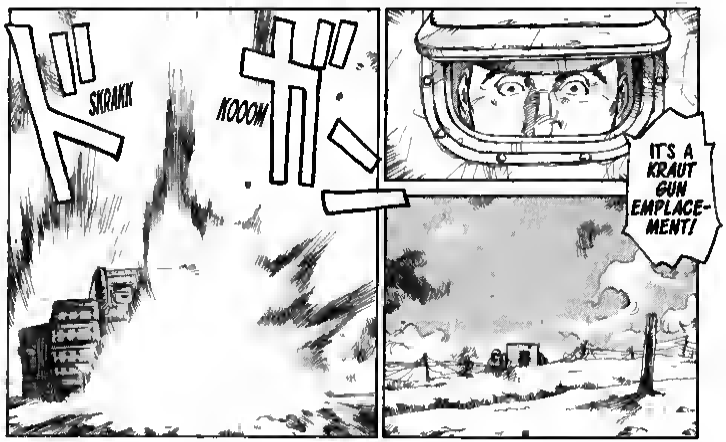
KACLANK
KACLANK

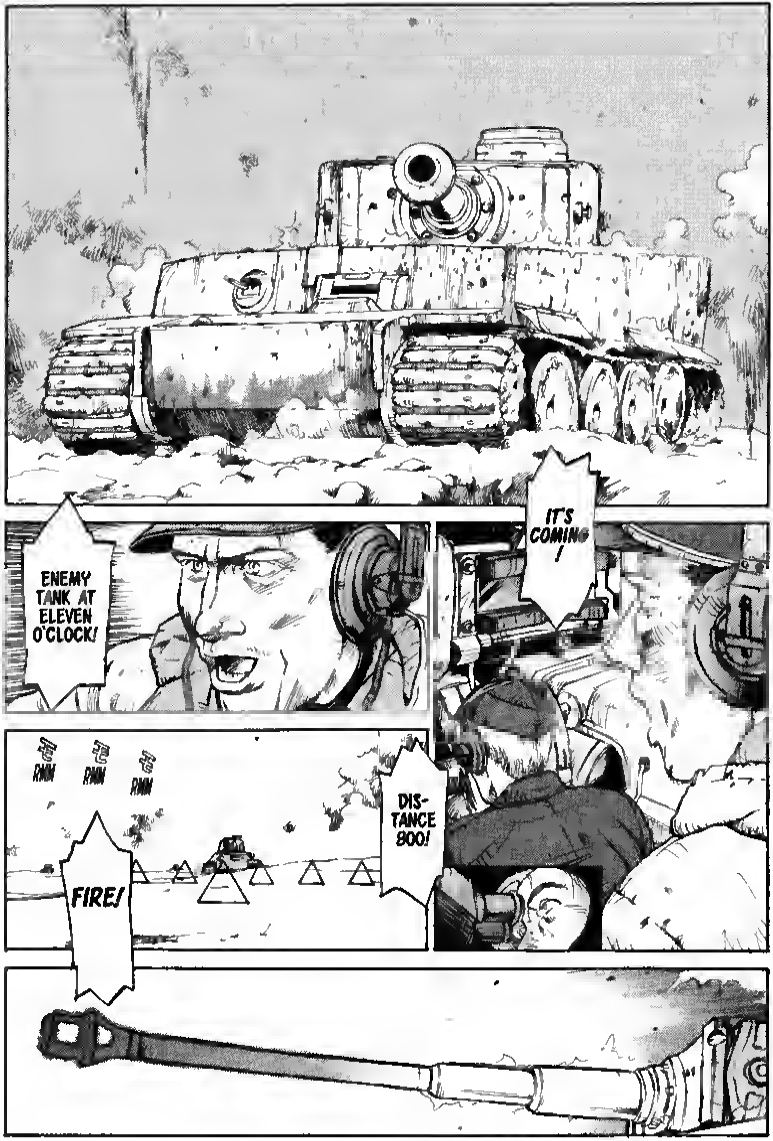
RUMM
RUMM
PUT IT INTO LOW GEAR!

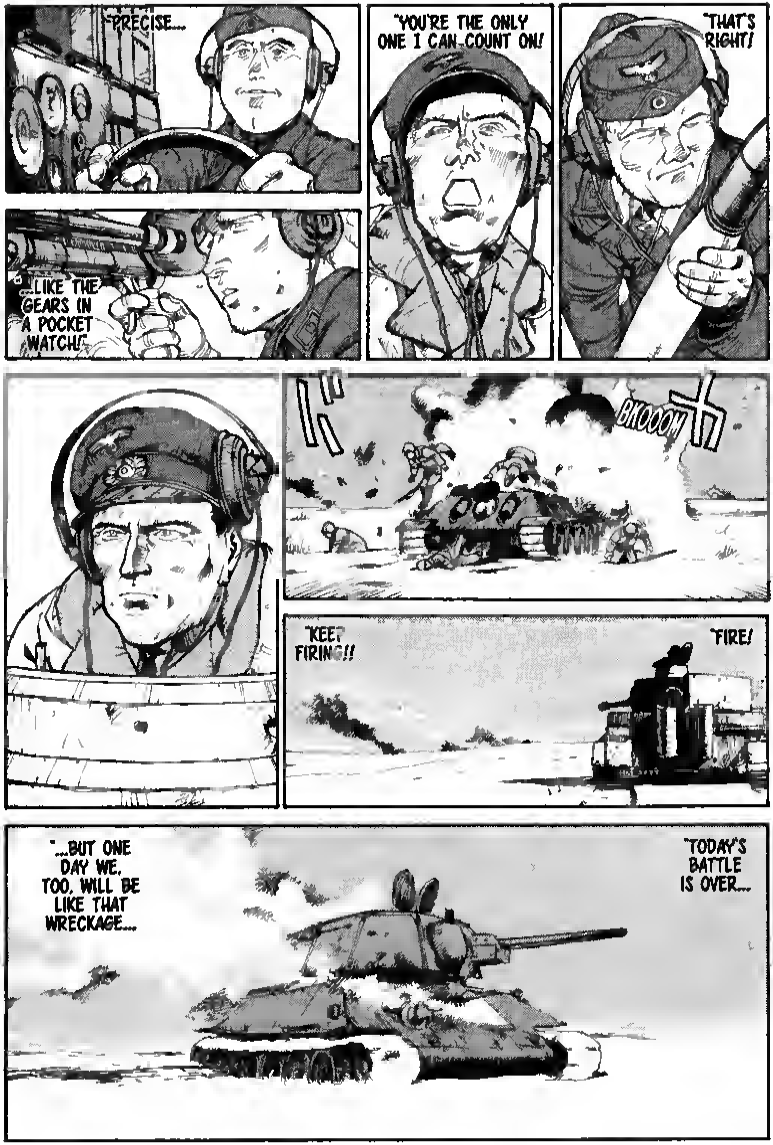
TANKS

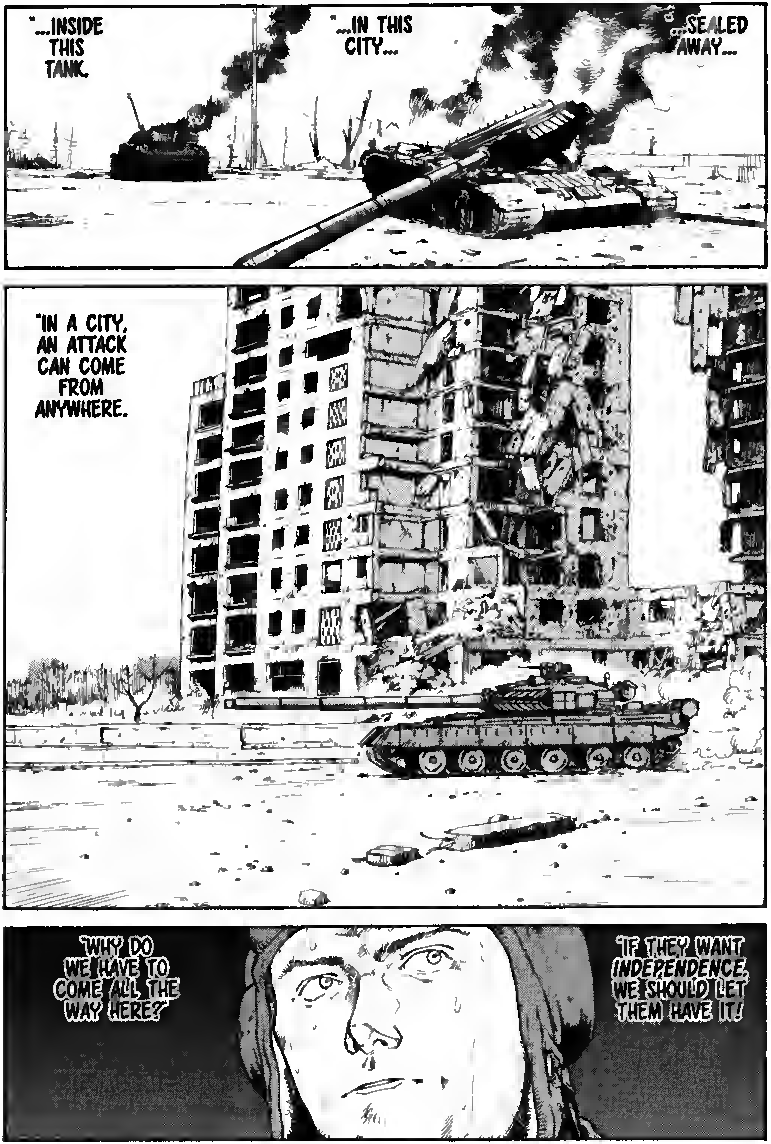


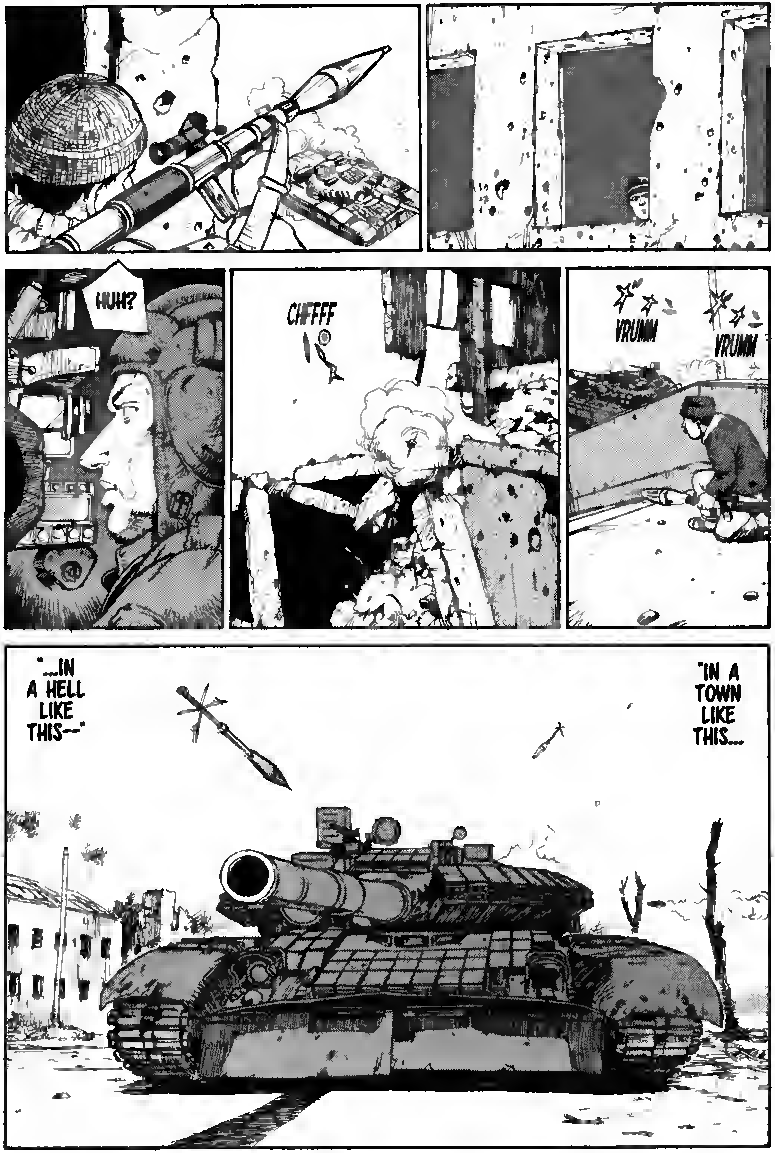

THEY'VE STOPPED FIRING...
KKCH
KKCH
KKCH
FKOOM

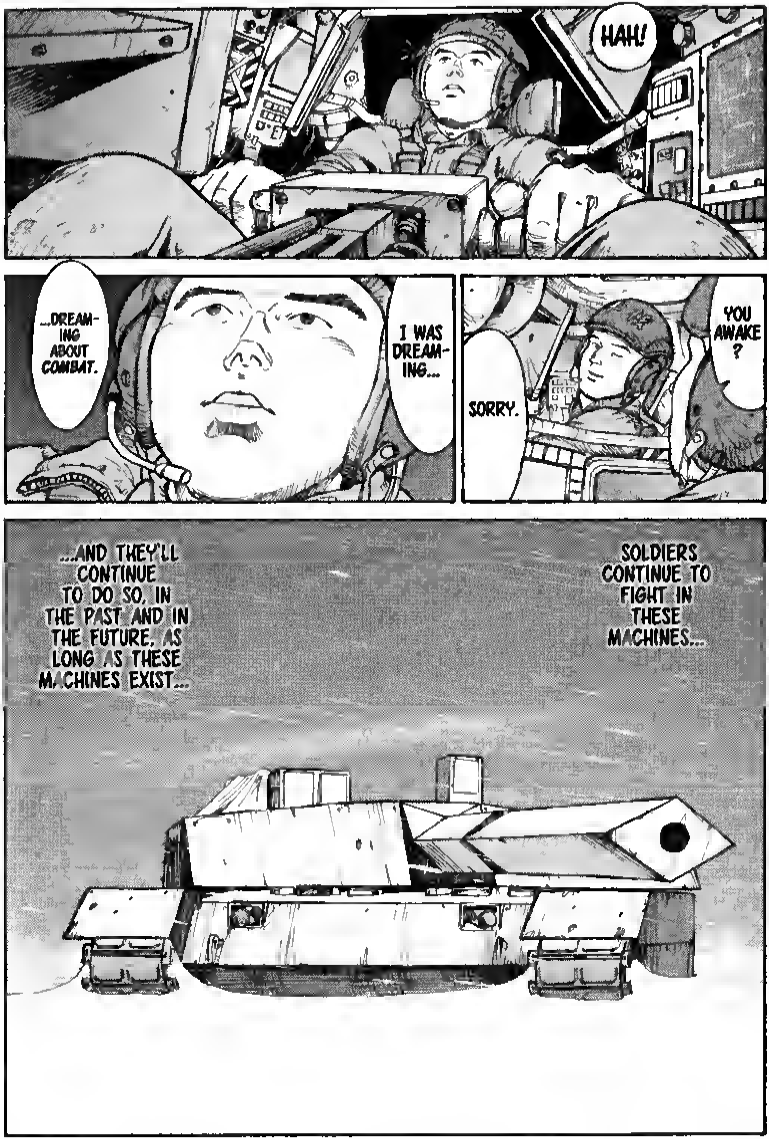

SKRAKK
KOOOM
IT'S A KRAUT GUN EMPLACE-MENT!


ENEMY TANK AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK!
IT'S COMING!
RMM
RMM
RMM
FIRE!
DIS-TANCE 800!


"PRECISE...
"YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I CAN COUNT ON!
"THAT'S RIGHT!
"...LIKE THE GEARS IN A POCKET WATCH!
BROOOM
"KEEP FIRING!!
"FIRE!
"...BUT ONE DAY WE, TOO, WILL BE LIKE THAT WRECKAGE....
"TODAY'S BATTLE IS OVER...


"...INSIDE THIS TANK.
"...IN THIS CITY...
"...SEALED AWAY...
"IN A CITY, AN ATTACK CAN COME FROM ANYWHERE.
"WHY DO WE HAVE TO COME ALL THE WAY HERE?
"IF THEY WANT INDEPENDENCE, WE SHOULD LET THEM HAVE IT!


HUH?
CHFFFF
VRUMM
VRUMM
"...IN A HELL LIKE THIS--"
"IN A TOWN LIKE THIS..."


HAH!
YOU AWAKE?
SORRY.
I WAS DREAMING...
...DREAMING ABOUT COMBAT.
SOLDIERS CONTINUE TO FIGHT IN THESE MACHINES...
...AND THEY'LL CONTINUE TO DO SO, IN THE PAST AND IN THE FUTURE, AS LONG AS THESE MACHINES EXIST...

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WHO FIGHTER with Heart of Darkness

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AFTERWORD

Yeah . . . well, to be honest, I never thought this would even see the light of day. And about the contents, well, I did my best to have it all go as smoothly as possible, so there isn't much else to say about that. However, things as they are, I know that a lot of people will be expecting some sort of an afterword from me (in fact, someone even once told me that my afterwords were the most interesting parts of my books). With that in mind, here you are . . .

I came up with the basic idea for *WHO FIGHTER* after a ridiculous conversation I had with someone in my staff. One of the staff members asked me, "So, what do you have in mind for your next serialization?" I responded with, "So, like, a B-29 gets shot down . . . and then aliens pop out of the plane! Heh heh! Whatcha think of that? *Not* bad, eh?"

It was just something that spilled out of my head, but since I already had this screwed up idea, I decided, "Why not take it a step further?"

I started to think about it, and then I confirmed my own suspicions and the ones of those around me: I like scary stories. It doesn't matter if they are about UFOs or ghosts–I like just about anything frightening. And come to think of it, when I was a college student working on my *dojinshi*, I remember talking about stories from Jzunji Inagawa, Jun'ichi Yao, or Hiroshi Maruyama all night long. Wow . . . what a wasted youth. But it's true. The stories that would keep my mind entertained at night were ones like *Mothman*, *Men in Black*, and *Little Gray*. You know, I might even start drawing ghost stories one day.

Heart of Darkness was born out of my desire to do something that was already "as is." Because it was "as is," there's no need to explain where the idea came from. To be honest, when I am doing original serializations, my ideas tend to run out after the third installment. I usually don't develop an original story carefully enough or construct enough details in the story. As a consequence, I tend to "run out of story" in the middle of a series.

In my original pieces, characters can lead the story on their own. However, when I am working with a story that isn't my original idea, I need to put some extra effort into scripting the piece. When running pieces just for serialization, I can get away with stories that just seem to "stop short," but when something is to be collected in a book, you don't have that kind of flexibility. While thinking about what to do with this and re-formulating ideas, three years passed. I then decided that I should read the story very carefully, omit one of the originally serialized episodes, and then add two new ones. If you've read the serialized version of this, it'd be interesting to see what you thought after reading the final version here, after comparing the two. I suppose I learned a very important lesson: take writing seriously from the very beginning of a project.

Summarily, I'd like to apologize to the staff at both ArtBox and Dai-Nippon Kaiga. I made you suffer tremendously during serialization. Furthermore, I made you wait over three years for the collection to see the light of day. (You must've wanted to give up on me!) I'd like to give special thanks to editor/proofreader Shimoyama-kun and to Hajime Nakano–part of the art staff–who supported me on so many levels during this project. This book wouldn't be here without your help! And finally, a big "Thank you!" to all my readers. I will keep writing–to some extent, at least . . .

All right, everyone, see you on the baseball field. Or, uh, maybe not.

–Seiho Takizawa, 2004

(translated by Michael Gombos and Riko Frohnmayer)

WHO FIGHTER

WITH HEART OF DARKNESS

Who Fighter with Heart of Darkness is the first presentation of any of Seiho Takizawa's gripping works in the English language, and it is a powerful collection of "weird war" manga. The three bizarre stories in this volume explore the toils of combat on the human mind and the dark forces that are unleashed by mankind's recurring spirals into warfare.

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This collection is translated into English but oriented in a right-to-left reading format, as originally published.

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WHO FIGHTER

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